The CAMP FIRE GIRLS at Hillside

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Miss Madelyn
Thomassen
from
Marguerite and George

Camp Fire Girls Series

The Camp Fire Girls at Hillside

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As for Emmeline—she too had forgotten where she was. Once again her ambition had gripped her heartstrings, and she was singing out all the pent-up longing of the past years.

The Camp Fire Girls
At Hillside

BY

MARGARET LOVE SANDERSON

Author of

Captain Becky's Winter Cruise
Captain Becky's Masquerade

Illustrated by Hazel Roberts

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The Camp Fire Girls at Hillside

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As for Emmeline — she too had forgotten where she was. Once again her ambition had gripped her heartstrings, and she was singing out all the pent up longing of the past years. *Frontispiece*

"Of course, if it's a secret," Ruth said, "I don't want to pry." *Page* 100

The torrent gave way to a hard, steady downpour. Ruth peered out and saw, far below, the light gleaming in the cabin. "I'm going for help," she said. *Page* 134

And then the fun began. The girls could not keep their footing on the unwieldy shoes, and shrieks of laughter could be heard across the campus. *Page* 210

The Camp Fire Girls at Hillside

CHAPTER I

ON THE TRAIN

John Garnier carefully put a silk parasol, an alligator handbag, a morocco satchel, a box of candy, and an armful of gay-colored magazines on the rack overhead. Then he smiled down quizzically at his trim young daughter.

"Well, Ruth," he said, "I suppose by the end of a month the entire freshman class will be as much under your thumb as your mother and I—"

"The idea!" Ruth protested with a half-pouting smile. "Anyway, mother says I get my disposition from you."

Her father laughed and bent down to kiss her. "Good-bye," he said tenderly. "Take care of yourself — as well as the remainder of the school," teasingly.

There was the least bit of longing in Ruth's eyes

as she watched his broad shoulders edge through the rapidly filling car. She was on her way to Miss Belaire's academy for girls, and he had brought her from their home in Illinois to the Grand Central Station in New York City, and put her on the north-bound train. The remainder of the journey to the school among the picturesque hills of New England she would make alone.

She began to count the days till she would see him. September — October — then, with a quick, determined shrug of her shoulders, she resolutely put homesickness and loneliness out of her mind, and began to inspect her fellow travelers.

Anyone who had overheard her father's words would have needed only one look at her clever, interesting eyes, and straight, well-built shoulders, to understand his proud raillery. She was not pretty, except as brown hair brushed to satiny smoothness, a clean healthy skin and clear brown eyes, constitute prettiness. Her mouth was large, but its corners turned up; there was no whimper-suggesting droop. Her face and bearing had the same clean wholesome charm as a gay pink peony bravely defying a stiff May wind.

She glanced wistfully at two girls across the aisle who were giggling softly over an open magazine. But they seemed quite content with their own society. Farther down the aisle sat another girl, also intent upon a periodical. Ruth heard her ask the conductor when they would reach Hillside, and so knew her for one of her future companions. The empty seat beside her was inviting. Ruth was a decidedly sociable person. She half-rose to go to her, then sank back, for the girl's face was rather too prim and serious, and there was a hint of haughtiness in her clean-cut profile.

There were several other girls in the car. Ruth looked over every one. She was pretty sure that most of them were bound for Hillside. Their traveling suits, chic hats, and multiplicity of satchels had an air of affinity. Over the brown plush back of a seat a short distance in front of her, appeared a mass of pale golden hair loosely knotted in a way that entranced Ruth, who had a keen eye for beauty. It had been covered with a wide-brimmed panama draped with white messaline. But the girl had removed her hat.

Ruth wondered if her face matched the hair in

charm. She sprang up, and went to the bubbling drinking fountain at the end of the car. But her ruse was not successful, for when she returned, the girl had turned and was gazing out the window, her elbows propped on the sill, and one cheek buried in her clasped hands.

Disconsolately Ruth sought her own seat. Of course in time she would know all the girls about her. But a brisk feeling of camaraderie made her tap a suede oxford impatiently. She wanted to know some one that very minute — she wanted to talk.

Just then the girl with the golden hair put up her hands to arrange a loose strand. Ruth started joyously. On one slim little wrist gleamed a bracelet exactly like one in her alligator hand-bag. Ruth sprang up and pulled the bag down from the rack, toppling magazines with it in her excitement. Then without delay she walked down the aisle, and smilingly extended her arm.

The girl with golden hair looked incredulously at the carved "Wohelo." The next moment she squealed with joy, and pulled Ruth down into the seat beside her.

"Oh, are you one, too?" she gurgled. "I've simply been dying for some one to talk to! Isn't it awful when you are all alone and don't know anyone, and haven't enough spunk to speak to anyone?"

"What a preposterous situation!" Ruth laughed. "Two Camp Fire Girls sitting six feet apart for two hours and not getting acquainted!"

"I looked over every one right away, but I couldn't see a single ring or pin," she answered plaintively.

"I wish I'd had my bracelet on all the time," said Ruth with compunction for her lack of initiative. She was delightedly taking in the other girl's demurely sweet face with its delicate pink and white coloring and great dark eyes. "You're bound for Miss Belaire's?"

"Yes — and I'm half-scared," with a soft quavering laugh. "That is, I was," with a shy upward glance of frank satisfaction.

"My name is Anne Follett," she continued with a touch of formality. "I hate that name, 'Anne.' And I live at Arlington, just out of Baltimore. And I'm seventeen."

"A year younger than I am," said Ruth, who had listened entranced to the soft blurring of Anne's 'r's.'

At that moment a grinning black face, its ebony hue intensified by the white expanse of linen coat and whiter expanse of wide teeth, appeared and announced that "Luncheon is now ready in the dining cah!"

Ruth jumped up with all the alacrity of a healthy appetite. "I'm starved. Aren't you?"

Anne rose more leisurely. "Yes," she drawled. "I'm so glad that I don't have to go in by myself."

As the train rounded a curve somewhat jerkily, she clasped Ruth's arm for support. In the seat Anne had not seemed so small. Now Ruth was surprised to find that there was a difference of several inches in their height, and that she was broader. All the motherliness in Ruth's disposition — and it was no small amount — bubbled forth. She pulled Anne's fingers within her own and piloted her to a table with as much care as a stout matron in green serge was giving to her small son two tables beyond.

"What will you have?" Ruth promptly asked, taking possession of the menu card. "Some chicken salad — or a chop?"

"Whatever you like," said Anne, passively folding her hands in her lap while Ruth wrinkled her forehead over the directions to the waiter.

It was the first time that either girl had been in a dining car without some older person to take charge. Anne plainly showed her timidity. Ruth as plainly displayed her latent self-reliance.

Across the aisle were seated the two girls whom Ruth had first noticed. They were exchanging gay comments with two others at the next table.

"They say the hills behind the dormitories are lovely," said one. She was not pretty, but her thin face and snappy black eyes were alive with good nature. Ruth noticed, without jealousy, that her plain tan linen suit was cut with a smartness of line that her own lacked.

"Those hills, Miss Pellew," said a slim girl with a cheerfully upturned little nose, "are much nicer to look at than to climb."

But Ruth and Anne exchanged contented glances.

"Not for Camp Fire Girls," Ruth murmured. "We can keep up our walks together. And maybe there will be others."

"If only we can room together," said Anne. "Maybe we shall. There are to be two others in my room. Maybe you are one."

Her eyes glowed, and she laid down a fork heaped with chicken salad, in order to clasp her hands in joy.

"I'm afraid not," Ruth returned. "Miss Belaire arranges the girls as she thinks best. And I know that there will be only one girl in my room. I wonder," with a longing glance at the four across the aisle, "if she is one of them."

Anne looked over indifferently. She was completely satisfied with Ruth's companionship. "Then I hope our rooms are near," she said dreamily. "I feel — oh, just as if I'd known you always. I might have known that you were a Camp Fire Girl. You have such a nice comfortable face."

Like most shy, reserved people, Anne was very outspoken as soon as she fell into a friend's hands.

Ruth laughed outright at the frank tribute. But there was plently of affection in the amused look she gave Anne. And she watched the other girls with less wistfulness. She liked them all; Anne the most, because she was already acquainted with her, and Anne's little soft appealing ways and flower-like beauty compelled love. But she had a strong conviction that she was going to be immensely fond of the slim girl with snappy black eyes who tossed her words out with a certain impudence; and the little girl with the nondescript brown hair and pug nose, whom they called Sarah, was a dear; and she loved to look at the rippling red hair of a tall slender girl in navy blue pongee. The fourth, the one whose clear-cut profile suggested haughtiness, might prove less responsive.

But Ruth knew that in the end she too would be a friend. Back in the home town, Ruth was leader. She had the assurance that comes from natural ability for leadership. Her father had told her more than once that she should have been a politician.

When they had finished luncheon and returned

to the other car, Anne settled herself happily, ready for an afternoon of pleasant talk. The magazine which she had been reading when Ruth introduced herself had fallen to the floor. Ruth picked it up.

"A musical journal?" she exclaimed. "Then you —"

Anne blushed, and completed the sentence. "Oh, I haven't got very far, but I hope some day to — play."

Her eyes went dreamily out the window to the elusive glint of the river between the trees. Something in the short pause that she made before the last word, and the quick little indrawing of her breath revealed to the observant Ruth that her passion for music was deep and real; not the average desire to dash off a brilliant composition with mechanical exactness.

"You have the right fingers," she said. For Anne's fingers were so long as to be out of proportion to her small build.

"Oh, yes," Anne replied carelessly. "But one can't compose with fingers."

"Oh!" Ruth almost gasped. The ambition was

so much bigger than Anne's yielding personality had promised. And at once her affectionate manner became tinged with decided respect. Ruth had all an ordinary girl's awe for the unusual.

It was not hard to draw out all Anne's hopes and desires. With a candor quite devoid of vanity, she admitted that she had a fairly strong soprano voice. But she counted that of little moment beside the power to weave into audible melody the vague symphonies that lay, dream-buried, in her heart.

"And I *have* to take music, vocal as well as instrumental," came a shrill wail from behind them. Ruth recognied the voice as belonging to the girl with the heavy auburn hair. "When my father lays the law down, there's nothing to do but obey. But making me take lessons, and making me practice are two different things. To tell you the plain truth, I intend to have a gloriously easy time this year. I daresay the teachers will report me as hopelessly stupid. Father won't know the truth."

"Luckily my father doesn't care," laughed a sweeter voice. "He merely thinks that Kentucky

can't produce the requisite amount of polish he desires to see in his daughter, so he's sending me north to get it."

"I envy you, Jane Pellew," came the querulous answer.

Before Ruth and Anne could comment except by amused glances, the conductor stuck his head in the door, and called the station next to Hillside.

Instantly there was a rush of preparation, and fathers' likes and dislikes were forgotten. Anne trembled as she hastily pinned on her hat and began to get together her belongings. Even Ruth, as she scooted back to her original seat and reached for the articles in the rack overhead, felt a thrill that was not unmixed with apprehension. Back home everything had been so smooth and pleasant. She wondered if it would prove the same here.

"Ruth!" said Anne excitedly. "Isn't it lovely?"

Ruth looked with beauty-loving eyes. The train had rounded the first of a group of hills. Among the rocks and green pines came occasional flashes of autumn-yellowed foliage. Behind the two hills

at the west the sun was sinking. But it was still high enough to send down long quivering rays that shot through the shrubbery and illumined into radiant ripples a small stream.

Down in the hollow formed by the circle of hills lay Hillside, a town of wide, maple-shaded streets and trim flower-bordered lawns.

The engine shrieked its hoarse announcement of approach. Anne piled her handbag, magazines and other belongings into one small hand, and with the other clung tightly to Ruth.

Ruth's eyes were glowing. Across the empty plush seats, she caught the snappy black eyes of the girl called Jane Pellew, and smiled happily.

"Hi — ill — si — ide!" bawled the conductor. "Miss Belaire's Aca — ademy!"

"Come, Anne," commanded Ruth. "We're here."

CHAPTER II

THE ARRIVAL AT HILLSIDE

Even Ruth, who had more poise and assurance than the average girl of eighteen years, was abashed when she stepped from the car to the platform and looked down at a throng of upturned smiling faces. She was not surprised that Anne's clasp of her arm tightened convulsively.

There were girls in pink linen and blue; girls in white duck and purple crash; girls in frilly lingerie waists, and girls in stiff tailormade. And every girl present had come down for the express purpose of inspecting the new freshman arrivals. Nor was the inspection silent.

"Some shoulders!" slangily called an athlete in severe brown gingham, as she noted Ruth's strong young build, well displayed as she stood on the top step until Jane Pellew and the girl with auburn hair descended.

"Where, Nell?" called a tall, tan-cheeked girl.

"On the steps. See — with the red quill in her hat!"

Ruth flushed. That red quill had been her mother's choice. But she assumed indifference as she stepped down, and helped Anne. And she forgot to be self-conscious in her pride over Anne. No one would ever appraise Anne as a valuable ally in basketball. But all the interested eyes below glistened with admiration as they rested upon her dainty pink and white face and lovely diffident eyes.

"I think it's frightfully rude of them to yell so," the girl with auburn hair stormed, half under her breath. For some one had started her class yell, and instantly a din of shrill rah-rah's made the air clamorous.

"And they stare as if we — were freaks," she added to Ruth.

A pert little sophomore heard her. "Oh, you freshmen," she sang and smiled impudently, "with your polite ways and shaking knees!"

The girl had twinkling brown eyes and hair so curly as to be kinky. The girl with auburn hair flashed her one angry look, and then hurried on.

Ruth, listening, was amused, more by the droll impudent twinkle in the brown eyes than by the other girl's discomfiture. She half-turned from Anne, who was finding it hard work to cling to Ruth and still manage her various articles of luggage. Ruth turned back suddenly at the same moment that Anne swung around to see what had taken her attention. As a result, both girls loosened their hold of magazines and candy boxes, and there was a heap of fluttering leaves, chocolate creams, marshmallows and handbags on the station platform.

Anne gave a little helpless shriek of dismay. Together she and Ruth, while every one around giggled encouragement, stooped to pick them up. But as they bent over, their faces crimson, two young fellows had pressed forward from some place in the crowd, and relieved them of the task.

At this Anne's face acquired a more vivid crimson. She almost preferred to do without such aid, especially as the chorus of giggles increased. Ruth straightened gladly. The younger of the two boys reminded her of her own brother; he had the same generous amount of freckles. About the

older was a sedate air of gallantry that she half liked, and was half inclined to ridicule.

"I'm afraid," sighed the younger, "that the candy is wasted." He looked sadly at the scattered chocolates.

"Of course they are, Howard," said the other, as he got Anne's last magazine. Then he explained to Ruth that, "Howard is awfully strong on chocolates. He hates to see one lost."

"I've seen you put away a few pounds in a week, Lafe," came a return jibe.

The girls thanked them, Ruth in matter-of-fact tone, Anne almost inaudibly, and held out their hands for the rescued articles. But the boys coolly retained possession of them and carried them across the platform and around to the side of the low, red-painted depot where a large yellow bus stood.

A woman of about thirty years came forward to greet them. Her clever gray eyes lighted appreciatively at sight of Ruth, and grew tender when they reached Anne. She introduced herself as Miss Kellar, instructor in physical culture, whom Miss Belaire had sent down to meet the new girls.

Then she ushered them into the nearly filled bus.

The driver lifted the reins, and the horses started toward the hill which sloped directly up from the main street of the little town. Ruth looked back interestedly. The throng of girls, since the newcomers had left, was scattering. A group of gay gowns disappeared back of the depot, to reappear a few moments later between the low clumps of bushes that marked the slope of another hill. Other groups and pairs sauntered up the main street, most of whose shop windows were inviting with mounds of pastry, wheels of gorgeous postcards, dainty pictures mounted in passepartout; all frankly catering to girlish tastes.

From every group and pair came trills of laughter or the sound of animated talk. But the bus held a silent sorrowful set. The snappiness of Jane Pellew's eyes had melted into panic. Anne had frankly collapsed into a limp heap of nervousness. The tall, rather haughty girl removed her glasses twice to wipe them free of the tear-mist that blurred them.

Ruth alone had eyes for the beauty of the drive, and even her appreciation was somewhat marred

by a longing recollection of the ugly flatness of her home town.

The elusive bits of water which they had seen from the car window resolved themselves into a twinkling picturesque creek which ran parallel with Main Street for nearly half a mile, and then separated into two crooked branches which bubbled through the rocks and bushes of two small valleys.

One of these small valleys lay at the base of the hill on whose gradually sloping side stood long green and white buildings that Ruth knew at once were those of the academy. And Miss Kellar smilingly drew the other girls' attention to them. Anne looked at them as one looks at a prison, and her small mouth drooped more than before.

But Ruth was recovering her usual vivacity. Gleaming among the dwarf pines of the adjoining hill stood a large comfortable-looking red house. Several tennis nets shone white through the green shrubbery, and wide verandas seemed overflowing with young fellows in white flannel trousers and hats with gorgeously colored bands.

In reply to Ruth's question, Miss Kellar

explained that a Professor Leonard, formerly an instructor at Princeton, maintained a small private school for young men at his home. She added that the two boys who had picked up the magazines for Ruth and Anne belonged to it.

And then the bus drew up in front of the wide steps leading to the largest of the green and white buildings. Miss Kellar descended and warmly bade the girls welcome. They followed her across the white-tiled vestibule into a large severely furnished hall. From there, a wide corridor led to Miss Belaire's offices.

Miss Belaire was large, sweet-faced and matronly. Her soft gray hair, rolled up evenly from a smooth white forehead, exactly matched her soft gray silk gown. She was very kind, although just then it was of necessity a hurried kindness. Dinner would be served in an hour, and the girls must be assigned to their rooms that they might freshen themselves after the journey. So she had only time to give each one a cordial handshake, ascertain her name, and then turn her over to Miss Drexal, the registrar, whose desk adjoined her own.

Anne never loosened her tight hold of Ruth's arm. Both girls hoped until the last minute that some lucky chance would interefere with Miss Belaire's arrangements, and put them in the same room.

But the tall girl with the eyeglasses, who proved to be Betty Wyndham from the northern part of New York state, and Jane Pellew, the girl with the snappy black eyes, were introduced to Anne as her roommates. The three were sent upstairs. Anne, with quivering lips, gave Ruth's arm a last forlorn clasp, and departed.

Two tall pretty girls, neither over sixteen, were next assigned. One was Frances Bliss from Colorado, and the other, Sarah Manning from Nevada. Frances had light brown hair, and a fair freckled skin. Sarah was darker. But both had the same eager walk and bright eyes. They had already become well acquainted on the train, and skipped off to their room in perfect content.

Whenever Ruth saw another girl, she immediately began to wonder if that girl would be interested in the Camp Fire movement. And now she was quite sure that these two, because

of their quick movements and bright expression, would be splendid members.

The auburn-haired girl, who was Blanche Shirly of Pennsylvania, was sent up with a petulant young woman of seventeen, Jeannette Hayes of Ohio. Jeannette was plump, and might have been pretty if she hadn't been pouting. She was cross, and she didn't care who knew it. Her head ached, and she was homesick. She didn't like to go school, and she didn't care to have a roommate. She was used to having a room by herself — and she frowned rudely at Miss Shirly.

Miss Drexal and Miss Belaire exchanged troubled glances. But both smiled, as though in relief, when they looked at Ruth, the last one.

"You will be alone for a day or two," said Miss Drexal. "Your roommate, Miss Emmeline Cerrito, has not come yet."

"What an unusual name," said Ruth impulsively.

"She is from Nicaragua," Miss Drexel told her.

Ruth's face lighted with interest. To a girl who has spent all her life in a small town in

prosaic Illinois, Nicaragua sounds wonderfully alluring. A little thrill of excitement stirred her. For the moment she forgot to regret Anne.

And instantly a thrill of doubt followed. For of course the girl wouldn't be — white. A colored girl! Ruth was almost dismayed. The girl would be just as good as a white girl. Ruth soberly conceded that. But there might be disagreeable incidents. Some of the girls — Blanche Shirly, for instance — might not be careful of her feelings. It would be terrible if she should be treated unkindly.

At that moment Miss Drexal's friendly smile brightened. She had caught sight of Ruth's bracelet. Reaching over, she took Ruth's hand, showing a similar bracelet on her own wrist.

Ruth squealed with delight. "Oh, I'm so glad," she cried enthusiastically. But before she could say more, a gong sounded and Miss Belaire turned around to tell her that dinner would soon be announced.

The discovery that Miss Drexal was a member of her beloved organization had swept away all Ruth's loneliness. She fairly danced as she was

taken up to her room. And once there, she delayed her preparations for dinner until she had reveled in the view from her windows.

Steep hills, tufts of delightful green shrubbery, with here and there a contrasting splotch of sandy slope, rocks surrounded by vines that were showing just a touch of the crimson and yellow that a month later would be over everything; and through the leaves, the glistening waters of the tiny stream that ran down to the creek in the valley.

Reluctantly she turned away. It was lovely to stand there and dream of Camp Fire hikes and picnics, but her hair needed brushing, and her ecrue pongee waist was dusty. While she was getting a dainty white one from her satchel, there was a soft tap at the door. Miss Drexal's pleasant full-featured face appeared.

"I just ran up," gayly, "to have a little chat."

"About the Camp Fire?" Ruth asked eagerly. "Do you know, I hardly dared hope that I'd meet any one who belonged."

"I became interested this summer," Miss Drexal explained. "I was visiting my sister

down in Massachusetts, and my niece is a very active member. Before I knew it, I was inveigled into long walks. And then I spent a month in camp. I do not think," she continued with a touch of seriousness, "that I have ever heard of a movement so calculated to benefit girls, both in character and in health. The combination, the outdoor life, and the insistent idea of unselfish service and actual labor, is almost perfection."

"It has cured me of several notions," laughed Ruth. "Before I joined I couldn't bear to put my hands in dishwater or pare potatoes. Now," she proudly opened the chatelaine bag which hung at her belt, and displaying a string of beads, "see the honors! All won this last year!"

"Fine!" said Miss Drexal.

"A little girl who came on the same train is one of us," Ruth went on excitedly. "The dearest girl! She and I have planned to keep up the work by ourselves. But since you are one, we must organize a regular Camp here in the school! Right away!"

"Oh!" said Miss Drexal. "I don't know about that."

Ruth's face fell. "Oh, can't we?" she pleaded.

"It would be rather unusual," Miss Drexal said slowly. "I am not sure that Miss Belaire would approve." And then she smiled at Ruth's downcast face. "But I will ask her. And if she has no objection, we will certainly organize a Camp."

CHAPTER III

GETTING SETTLED AND ACQUAINTED

The big dining room was overpowering to a newcomer. The cool green shades and ruffled white Swiss curtains at the windows, and the soft green matting on the floor, made it a very attractive apartment. But there were so many tables, and they were so very long. The rows of white plates and neatly arranged silverware seemed interminable to a lonely girl entering for the first time.

In the corner where the freshman tables were grouped, melancholy silence prevailed. Miss Kellar sat at the end of the last table and tried her best to introduce a cheerful flow of talk. But she was not very successful. More than one girl let salty tears drop to her napkin before she could surreptitiously wipe them away.

Anne and her two roommates were at the same table as Ruth, but separated from her by three

other girls. So they could not talk very comfortably. As soon as the forlorn meal was ended, the freshmen scooted through the laughing groups of sophomores and juniors and sought their rooms. The seniors were more dignified, and not so inclined to jeer, but just as formidable and strange.

Ruth waited on the first landing of the stairs for Anne, and went in to get acquainted with her two roommates. With Jane Pellew, this was delightfully easy. Like Anne, Jane drawled her words out to charming length, and didn't seem to know that the alphabet contained an "r." But she had a quicker way of moving and speaking that made the two girls entirely different.

"Kentucky and Illinois aren't so far apart," she told Ruth with quick friendliness.

"Kentucky — that's where all the women are beautiful," sighed Betty Wyndham in an affected way that did not suit her tall prim style.

"So they say," Jane replied carelessly. "I've never been singled out as a representative specimen, though. It's so frightfully warm that I'm going to take my collar off — if you don't mind."

The last was so evidently a forced bit of politeness, that Ruth laughed.

And then they discovered that Anne had crumpled in a big easy chair, and was crying with all her might.

"Good gracious!" said Jane. Her bright black eyes opened wide in sympathy, and then she rapidly winked her black lashes.

"If you don't quit," she cried uneasily, "I— I'll cry myself."

"I wish I was home," said Betty dolefully. "I don't think I care much about going away to school."

Ruth crossed the room and plumped herself down in the chair with Anne, whereupon Anne's sobs lost their violence, and finally quavered away into a soft whimper.

Betty Wyndham sat on the edge of her bed, her hands clasped in her lap and her serious face wrinkled mournfully. Jane whirled over to her bed and dropped face downward on the pillows. The atmosphere was depressing. Anne's whimper threatened to swell again into heart rending sobs.

Ruth had an instant vision of her mother and brother at home. They would be trying to read the papers, sitting by the oak table in the living room. But her mother would lay the paper down to wonder how Ruth was doing —

A very large lump popped from somewhere into Ruth's throat. But she choked it down. And then she firmly resolved to combat the wave of homesickness that was engulfing all four.

"Do you know," she cried to Betty — and not one guessed how very forced was the note of gayety in her voice — "you look exactly like Annie Russell in — oh, I can't think of the play —"

"Oh, do you really think so?" Betty was all animation. She sprang up, and the mournful lines beside her mouth disappeared as though by magic. "Once I gave an imitation of Annie Russell at an entertainment. And I just hated to leave home this fall because there is to be an amateur play given, and I could have had the leading part."

Anne raised her small tear-stained face. "Aren't you afraid?" she demanded in an awed voice.

"Afraid!" Betty was scorn incarnate. "I—oh, I feel perfectly in my element when I am before an audience." She swept across the room with an exaggerated importance of bearing, and adjusted her eyeglasses, which her impetuosity had sent awry. Then she drew a low rocker beside the one that held Anne and Ruth, and opened her locket to show them a picture of Sarah Bernhardt. Jane whirled up from her pillows and bounced over to share the view.

"My inspiration!" said Betty solemnly—almost with reverence. "Some day—" Her long-drawn sigh made plain what she expected to do some day.

"What does your mother say?" Jane demanded shrewdly. "And your father?"

"Oh, well!" Betty shrugged her shoulders with such theatric force that her eyeglasses almost toppled. And she sighed resignedly, "You know what parents are! My father," pensively, "is only a lawyer, so he isn't very sympathetic."

There was a peculiar gleam in Jane's black eyes. But she said nothing until she had kicked

off two patent leather pumps. Then she announced with a yawn that she was very tired, and could visit just as well in negligee as though garbed correctly.

But Ruth rose to go, in spite of Anne's tearful protests.

It was lonely in her room, and she wished that Miss Cerrito was there. However, she was too tired, both from the long journey and the excitement of reaching a new place, to stay awake. She did not try to unpack the trunk which had been brought up, but crawled sleepily into the first of the two white enameled single beds.

The next day there was little time for moping. Even Anne was so rushed by trying to unpack her trunk, get settled, arrange her pictures and photographs, and at the same time plan a course of study that would not interfere too much with her beloved music, that she lost all trace of homesickness.

Some of the parents had sent word exactly as to what their daughters should study. Ruth had been allowed to use her own discretion, and she

had enough common sense to choose what she felt she needed, not what would be easiest. Jane Pellew was rather disgusted with the list her father had sent.

"Mostly manners and mannerisms," she complained to Betty. "You see, down home everything has a horsey flavor. And he is determined that I shall grow out of it. But he's mighty good to me, so I'll have to humor him."

Miss Wyndham was too absorbed in her own affairs to be very sympathetic. She listened absently; she was trying to find room over her dressing table for eight photographs of Duse, the great Italian actress.

Ruth arranged a few knickknacks on her dresser and got out her sofa cushions. But otherwise she did not try to beautify the room until the arrival of Miss Cerrito, who had sent word that she would be delayed for several days. Ruth was considerate to an excessive degree of other people's feelings. The other girl would be sure to feel an alien, in a strange land, among a different class of people from those she had known. Ruth decided to smooth her way as much as pos-

sible. And she was sure that it would please her to arrange the room according to her own taste.

"I wonder if she will be peculiar," Anne had said when Ruth explained why her walls were still bare. "Do you think that you will like her?"

"Yes," said Ruth decidedly. "I don't allow myself not to like people. I wonder if she will want to be a Camp Fire Girl."

Thursday morning Miss Drexal met Ruth in the corridor as she was coming from chapel, and smiled gayly.

"Congratulate me! Miss Belaire not only sees no objection to our organizing a camp, but thinks that it is a remarkably sensible project."

"Oh!" Ruth could find no words ecstatic enough to voice her delight.

"So to-morrow morning I'll have a bulletin put up in the hall asking all those interested to meet in the chapel Saturday morning."

Ruth was all impatience till Saturday morning came. Anne, in a more demure way, was as much excited. Neither had had time in the

flurry of the first week to sound the other girls, but Ruth was sure that everyone would be anxious to join.

Miss Drexal explained the movement, dwelling strongly on its watchwords, Work, Health, and Love. She also emphasized the fact that it was a really helpful educational movement, and since all were at the academy for development along various lines, no one could fail to gain benefit from the Camp Fire demands.

While she was talking, Jane Pellew rose, and asked to be excused; she had an errand in the village.

"Oh," cried Ruth disappointedly. "Then you don't want to join?"

"Not me!" laughed Jane carelessly. "I just wanted to find out what we were meeting for."

Ruth eagerly looked at the other faces, to see which showed interest. Anne, of course, was listening intently to every word. But Anne already belonged.

Miss Wyndham was not listening at all. She looked around for a few moments with bored eyes, and then examined carefully the dainty Irish stock which Blanche Shirly was wearing.

"Would we have to wear that plain costume all the time?" Jeannette Hayes wanted to know. Her tone was not enthusiastic.

"Not unless you wish," Miss Drexal explained pleasantly. "But it must be worn at the meetings. And it is a very becoming outfit."

Jeannette's grimace expressed her disagreement.

"Why, all our new clothes would be wasted," Blanche Shirly explained in dismay. "And I am not strong. I can't walk far."

"That's why you need to join," smiled Miss Drexal.

But Blanche tossed her auburn head in distaste.

"Miss Cerrito will join," giggled Jeannette, forgetting for once to pout. "She's sure to be a star member. And she'll probably know all about camp fires and bead necklaces, and the war dance — Do they have a war dance?" she asked Frances Bliss in an audible whisper that reached Ruth, and brought the color to her face.

"I don't know," Frances replied. "But I think it sounds interesting."

"I wonder," said Blanche, "if Miss Cerrito

wears civilized clothes, or dresses like the natives. How do they dress down in that country, anyway?"

"I really don't think the school ought to take such a girl," Miss Wyndham declared offendedly. "I'm glad she's not in my room."

"She won't likely have a chance to bother us," Jeannette declared spitefully. "Miss Garnier will take absolute possession of her, and turn her into a bead-decked Camp Fire Girl so rapidly that the poor thing won't have a chance to be homesick for her own wigwam in Nicaragua. They live in wigwams there — don't they?"

"I wish you girls would keep still so I can hear what Miss Drexal is saying," Sarah Manning turned around to request. "I'm interested."

"I'm not," Jeannette declared. "If Ruth Garnier thinks she can drag me off every week over rocky hills to sit around a few smoking sticks, she's mistaken."

"Nor me," yawned Miss Wyndham. "I like her, but I don't like the way she gets acquainted with every one she sees."

But Frances Bliss moved away from the whis-

pering group. Like Sarah, she was used to outdoor life, and this new movement appealed to her.

The two Western girls had somehow held aloof from the other girls, and had not yet become acquainted except with each other. Both in clothes and actions, they were more simply dressed than Miss Wyndham, Blanche Shirly and the malicious little Jeannette. They seemed to lack the subtle little distinctions that marked the more smartly gowned girls. It put them at a disadvantage. They were proud in an unaffected way, and would not make the first advances.

But Ruth's enthusiasm drew them out. Ruth belonged to that rare class that is above dress and class. Back in Illinois she had ruled the girls and boys of her age, not because she was Ruth Garnier, daughter of the leading banker, but because she was Ruth Garnier herself, and had the power of ruling lovably.

This was the first time that Sarah and Frances had been in close contact with her. They promptly succumbed to her forceful charm, and hardly waited for Miss Drexal to finish her talk before announcing themselves eager members.

Ruth was glad to welcome them, but she was openly disappointed because no others were interested. Miss Drexal finally adjourned the meeting, and told the girls that another would be held the next week. By then the girls could have talked the matter over and come to a decision.

Miss Drexal smiled at Ruth's somber face.

"You mustn't expect results in a minute," she told her. "You see this is so new to most of the girls that they are puzzled. They haven't had time to dwell upon the charm. Wait until they are settled and have become accustomed to the routine of the recitations. Then they will be glad of the diversion."

Ruth brightened. "Then you think it wasn't altogether a fizzle?"

"I think it is a very good beginning," Miss Drexal assured her. "By the Christmas holidays it will be a splendidly developed movement."

CHAPTER IV

VISITING

As Anne and Ruth returned from a short stroll on the hill that afternoon, they passed Jeannette Hayes and Blanche Shirly on the campus. Blanche was lounging in a wicker armchair. Her auburn hair was arranged in an ornate fashion more suited to a coming-out party than a girls' school ground. She was wearing a very elaborate white linen gown with insertions of expensive baby Irish lace.

Jeannette was stretched in a hammock. Her pink pique was as expensive and made more fussily. Her chubby white hands fairly glistened with rings. A discontented scowl marred her round face.

Anne nodded shyly, but did not pause until Ruth gently caught her arm. And then she would have protested. But Ruth was beginning her campaign. She dropped to the ground beside

Blanche's chair, and pulled Anne down beside her.

"Lovely day," she announced. "We've been for a walk. Over behind that clump of pines just beyond the bend in the creek is a lovely wild grape vine."

"You've torn your dress on a bramble," said Miss Shirly.

Ruth looked calmly at the long rent in her crash skirt.

"Yes," she acknowledged without much concern. "But I can mend it so it won't show. I'll be glad when mother sends my Camp Fire suit next week. It takes a mighty stiff bramble to pierce it," with a gay laugh.

"I brought mine," Anne said hastily. "But I've not had it pressed."

"Are you really so much interested in that affair?" Jeannette asked. "Seems rather nonsensical to me. I like to be clean —"

"We're clean," Ruth gravely assured her.

"Oh," impatiently. "You know what I mean. Not tanned, and frowsy, as you are after being out in the woods."

Ruth looked seriously at Jeannette's fussily-

dressed hair; then at Anne's neat mass of golden braids. Her own hair was coiled in two smooth buns.

"It is horrid to be frowsy," said Ruth. And then she repented of her retort, and tried to make amends by an indirect compliment. "Do you design your dresses?"

Instantly the pout vanished from Jeannette's round face. She glanced down proudly at the intricate lace panniers. "Yes," she answered to the surprise of Ruth and Anne. "Every one. I love to design. Sometimes I wouldn't mind being poor and having a shop. It would be lovely to tell people what to wear."

"Good gracious!" Blanche Shirly sat up straight. "I hate to sew — or even plan a dress. I just tell the modiste the color, and give her a general idea of the style, and then I don't want to hear about it until it is finished."

"What do you like to do?" Ruth demanded.

"Oh!" Blanche considered. "I really don't know. Just have a good time — dances and theaters. I'll be glad," with a pout that rivaled Jeannette's, "when I'm old enough to go to restaurants and dine."

And then Blanche's large blue eyes wandered toward the red roof of Professor Leonard's house which was barely visible through the surrounding trees. And Ruth shrewdly guessed the foolish ideas that were sprouting in the pretty seventeen-year-old head.

She decided that the soil was not ready for the Camp Fire idea yet, and rose to go to her room. Anne jumped up eagerly. She had never yet overcome her shyness, especially with girls of Blanche's type.

On the wide steps leading to the big central veranda they met Sarah Manning and Frances Bliss. The two Western girls were strolling down slowly, with the listless air of having nothing to do. Frances' fair freckled face sagged mournfully.

"Going for a walk?" Ruth paused to question brightly. "We've just come back. I wish you had come with us."

"No," said Sarah. "We've been fixing our rooms, and now it's too late to go far before dinner."

"What are you going to do this evening?" Ruth demanded.

"Oh — study — I suppose," Sarah said sourly. "There's nothing else to do."

"I have nothing to study," said Frances sadly. "My eyes aren't strong, so mother arranged for a light course."

Her tone expressed the depths of woe. Even shy Anne was roused from her diffidence.

"Oh, come over and see us," she cried. "Goodness, I wouldn't think of studying on Saturday evening!"

"Well," Sarah confessed with grim candor, "we've talked to each other until we're talked out. We've told each other our own history, and that of all our relations. Now we're beginning to bore each other."

"We're *not*," Frances declared. Some of the woe had left her round light blue eyes. "Only, we two — sort of feel —"

"Of course," Ruth completed the pause understandingly.

"Then come over to Ruth's room as soon as dinner is over," Anne cried eagerly.

A queer objecting light came into Ruth's eyes. This hardly suited her plans. For she knew that

supercilious Betty Wyndham and Jane Pellew would not leave the privacy of their own apartment to get acquainted with the two Western girls. Indeed they had as much as intimated that they did not care for either. Both Sarah and Frances wore clothes of good material but ordinary cut. They lacked the swagger of the New York girl, and the careless poise of the Kentucky girl.

"Not our class," Betty had decided coldly.

"Good enough girls, I dare say," said Jane. "But they just don't appeal to me."

Ruth's brain could work with diplomacy and speed. In a moment she had perfected her plan.

"My room is rather small for a crowd," she said to Anne. "And Miss Wyndham and Jane wouldn't want to be left out. Suppose —"

"Of course," said Anne, readily falling into the trap. "Our rooms are much larger. And then you can get acquainted with Betty and Jane."

For besides the large room containing the dressing tables and three single beds, Anne and her roommates had two small alcoves for study.

Frances and Sarah looked somewhat dubious at the arrangement. Plainly they would have pre-

ferred Ruth's room. But Ruth cleverly gave them no time to object. She flung an arm around Anne's waist, and ran away, calling back that they would expect them immediately after dinner.

After dinner, she made matters more certain, by waylaying Sarah and Frances in the corridor leading from the dining room to the big general reading room, and gayly escorted them to the rooms where Anne had already flown to prepare Miss Wyndham and Jane.

"Good evening," said Betty very primly, and folded her pretty white hands in her lap in correct imitation of a hostess receiving a very formal call.

"Awf'ly glad to see you," said Jane cordially. She wasn't glad, not in the least, and she had shrugged her shoulders impatiently when Anne had timidly told her of the arranged call. But Jane was from Kentucky where hospitality is bred in the bone. Sooner than make guests feel unwelcome, even though she positively disliked them, she would have cut off her little finger. For the while, the rooms were her home. Her code demanded good-fellowship for the evening.

"Good evening," said Frances and Sarah together very stiffly, and sat uncomfortably in the chairs that Anne had offered them.

"Jane," asked Betty abruptly, "did you find a horse this morning in the village?"

"I found one," Jane answered with a slight frown, "but he is heavier than I liked. I wish I had my own mare, Trixy, here. She'd go up that steepest hill without a misstep."

"Oh," Sarah abandoned her stiff attitude to cry rapturously, "do you ride?"

"And I from Kentucky?" laughed Jane. "I couldn't live without a canter once a week. Do you?"

"And I from a ranch?" laughed Sarah. "Never saw a horse that could throw me."

In an instant Sarah and Jane were deep in a discussion of hoof and saddles and the easiest stirrup. Ruth smiled to herself and drew her chair between Betty and Frances, in order to bring out whatever mutual taste they had.

But Betty was coldly obstreperous. She wasn't interested in the West, and she wasn't inclined to be sociable. And Frances was hard to draw out.

Except for the flash of enthusiasm in the morning at the Camp Fire meeting, she seemed uninteresting.

"Anne," said Ruth finally, "won't you sing something for us? We've never heard you."

"Oh," gasped Anne, "I can't." And she looked ready to cry.

Ruth had a moment's compunction. It was a shame to use Anne, but she was bound to establish a friendly footing, and besides, she really was anxious to hear Anne's voice.

"Please," she pleaded. "I'm dying for some music. If my voice wasn't a cross between a foghorn and the screech of a night owl, I wouldn't trouble any one else."

Even prim Betty had to laugh. Anne succumbed with an irrepressible giggle. "What shall I sing?"

"Maryland! My Maryland!" said Ruth instantly. "You ought to know that!"

Anne sang "Ma'yland! Mah Ma'yland." But Ruth had forgotten the soft aching longing of the melody and its effect on the girls away from home for the first time.

Anne's sweet clear tones wavered on the second verse — then threatened to break entirely. But she held bravely out to the end.

"Please," beseeched Betty at the close, "sing something lively. That's an awfully homesicky song."

With all her primness and unbending ways, Betty was no more than any other girl at seventeen, and her tears came easily.

Without any other urging, Anne broke into a rollicking tune that described coon hunts, and chicken roosts, and "My Yellow Gal, Sal" with a vigor hostile to the blues.

There was much applause when she had finished. Betty looked at Anne with new interest. It seemed that the quiet little thing wasn't altogether a nonentity.

"And now you're going to recite — aren't you?" Ruth flashed at her before she had lost the animation inspired by Anne's singing.

"Oh, no," protested Betty, with a hasty return to her former reserve.

"If you don't, I will," threatened Jane. "And that'll mean nightmare for the crowd."

Jane's eyes were snapping. She was thoroughly enjoying herself.

"I would if I could," said Ruth with mock sadness. "But my only accomplishment is the ability to turn a double somersault."

"It must be lovely to have a beautiful voice!" Frances cried impulsively. She looked at the crimson-faced Anne with an admiration that was almost reverence.

Strange to say, it was this tribute from Frances to Anne that impelled Miss Betty to show what she could do. For Betty was an only child, and used to monopolizing the admiration. She had too much pride to push her talent into view, and too much common sense to appear conceited. Nevertheless, it piqued her that the two ordinary girls from the West should think that little bashful Anne was a marvel of genius.

Ruth was watching her face, and saw the signs of yielding.

"Any little thing," she coaxed, "if you don't feel like giving a long piece."

Betty cleared her throat rather affectedly, and adjusted her eyeglasses. The girls pushed their

chairs back in a row, and prepared to listen with intense interest.

Betty's aspirations were in advance of the usual schoolgirl efforts. She was inclined to be very intense. "Curfew shall not ring to-night" was childish to her. So presently five startled girls were hearing Kipling's strong description of a suttee.

Even practical Ruth was stirred by the daring recital. Anne's shoulders rose and fell under the thrill of Betty's voice. For Betty had suddenly thrown away every vestige of primness, and showed an unsuspected capacity for dramatic feeling. Frances sat with awed eyes and parted lips. Jane and Sarah were breathless.

And when finally the "little flames and lean" had "found their meal on the heart — of the Boondi Queen," there were five long-drawn gasps more eloquent than any applause could have been.

Betty, herself almost breathless, for elocution is demanding on chest capacity as well as emotion, dropped into a chair, and caught up a newspaper to fan herself. Then, with considerable satisfaction, she glanced at her audience.

The girls were silent; they hardly knew what to say. And then in concert they begged for more. But Betty, having produced the desired effect, was chary of her gift. She could not be coaxed, and vowed that was the only piece she could remember.

After that, there was a dragging interval. Ordinary talk seemed tame. Anne, mindful that she was chief hostess, felt that she ought to do something. So she opened her trunk and got out a box of homemade candy that her mother had sent her that day. The journey hadn't helped it, and it was dry and crumbly. But it was also sweet, and they fell upon it with delight.

Ruth munched absently. Always vibrant with life and energy, she was now thrilling to do something. Anne's singing and Betty's recitation had keyed her up to a point that demanded action. She simply couldn't go back to her room and sleep calmly alone.

"Dear!" she cried. "I wish Miss Cerrito was here. Or anything strange and unusual."

"How clear!" laughed Jane. "But I have brains enough to grasp your meaning. I feel the same way. I wish we all could sing or speak."

Inspiration came to Ruth. She sprang from her chair and waved a bar of fudge in the air.

"We can!" she cried. "At least we can pretend we can. Let's play we're giving a comic opera!"

"Now?" demanded Anne and Sarah together.

"Now, this very minute," cried Ruth eagerly. "Miss Frances Bliss, did I hear you tell Anne that your only accomplishment was stringing silly jingles together? Consider yourself under a five-minute contract to have some strung!"

CHAPTER V

SAVAGE MAIDENS

Ruth's enthusiasm was contagious. Betty forgot her pose of dignity. Anne rushed to get Frances pencil and some paper.

"I can't think on such short notice," wailed Frances.

"You've got to," ordered Ruth calmly. "Betty, you're the tallest — you can be the man. The rest of us will be savage maidens!"

"Where, may I ask," said Jane vivaciously, "is this production supposed to take place?"

"Oh, on an island, tropical island. Otherwise, we can't be savage maidens, and dress gorgeously. I wish Miss Cerrito was here — she'd be fine —"

"Ruth, please forget that dusky lady for a few minutes," Jane begged. "Is there only to be one gentleman in the affair? Will we quarrel over him? Betty, I see your finish — I warn you, no other maiden will have a show when I start."

"The queen will win the hero — he is a lieutenant with lots of gold braid, just arriving from somewhere. What shall we use for his uniform?" Ruth paused to consider.

Anne and Jane were already tumbling the contents of trunks and dresser drawers to the floor. And Betty, who, it seemed, came prepared for theatrical events, produced a box of carmine and a box of crayolas.

"I brought an old military suit belonging to my brother," said Frances Bliss, half-diffidently. "If Miss Wyndham would like to wear it —"

"How perfectly clever of you!" cried Miss Wyndham in delighted surprise. "I never would have thought — " She blushed and broke off.

"That you had so much sense," she nearly said.

Jane giggled her knowledge of the slip.

But Frances had already flown down the corridor to her room which was just around the first turn, and came back presently with the suit, also some gay motor veils, and two brilliant plaid silk petticoats.

"I shall be queen," Jane contumaciously announced. "No one else need apply for the job.

That hero is mine. My! Betty, you'd make a lovely youth! Wouldn't Professor Leonard like to enroll you!"

For Betty had smeared the black crayon over her upper lip, and made a fierce upturned mustache that quite transformed her from a prim, dainty-featured girl into a handsome young man. Her eyeglasses gave an added touch of masculine smartness. Her smooth walnut-brown hair she laid in flat braids so that the close-fitting cap completely concealed it.

Jane as queen was permitted to monopolize all the purple raiment on hand. She tossed out her straight black hair, and pinned a royal purple veil over her forehead. She discarded shoes and stockings, skirt and waist. A black silk shoulder drape and Frances' purple petticoat completed her costume. Then she drew the purple crayon heavily over her eyebrows, and dabbed the rouge on cheeks, chin, and ear lobes. And then she sang from the first slip Frances tossed over:

"I'm a royal lady!
I live by the sea!

I'm as lonesome
As ever a lady can be!"

"Oh, say," protested Anne, "wait till we're all fixed."

"Hurry up," ordered Queen Jane. "You're a punk lot of maids of honor. The hero will arrive before you get your warpaint on."

"Good gracious!" cried Frances, "what a lot of hair you've got, Anne!"

Anne blushed as every one exclaimed over the rippling golden mass that hung below her knees. She had slipped into a brilliant purple and green kimona. Against the gaudy silk, her hair seemed a gossamer cloud.

"You must be the chief attendant," cried Ruth. "You've been a castaway from a wrecked ship, and the Queen has taken a fancy to —"

"To the 'Albino Daughter!'" Sarah supplied enthusiastically. "She carries the Queen's palm leaf fan."

"We'll all take off our shoes and stockings," said Ruth wisely. "Because if we don't, the girls in the rooms below will think their ceiling is about to descend."

The innate sweetness of Ruth's character may be estimated by her state of mind when she let down her hair, and it proved to be thinner and shorter than any other girl's in the room. Sarah had long pretty brown hair, not curly but fine and glossy. Frances had two long chestnut braids. Ruth was quite undisturbed, and shook out her scanter brown tresses without a tinge of envy.

Then she dabbed the rouge and crayon vigorously on her own face and then on Frances who was too busy wooing the Muse to attend to her own decoration. Ruth and Sarah had to be content with black petticoats and light green veils. Betty, in gratitude for the cadet suit, arrayed Frances in her best silk kimona, a rainbow-hued affair with wide sleeves and a glittering cord at the waist.

The three maids then tripped to the center of the room and sang:

"We are only savage ladies,
Idling underneath the palms;
Far from telephones and trolleys,
And other lands' alarms!

"We're just simply dusky maidens,
Eating cocoanuts and flowers,
Basking gaily in the sunlight,
Through the golden tropic hours."

And then they dropped on one knee, extended their right hands toward the ceiling, clasped their left to their hearts, and caroled:

"Here comes the Queen,
Our beautiful Queen,
For whom stars shine;
For whom winds blow;
Whose look divine
Makes us to know
When day has come.
Our Queen benign!"

In front of the kneeling trio, Jane paused, fixed her eyes upon them with dramatic sadness. Her purple veil fell royally over her streaming hair. Behind her, Anne demurely waved a broad palm leaf fan to and fro. Jane hastily reread the scrap of paper which Sarah had given her, and wailed:

"A lonely Queen;
A lonely land;
And lonely savage maidens;
Our beauty rare,
Wasted on air,
Because no man will view it.
Our charm of face,
And winsome grace,
Only the sun will woo it."

She stopped and sobbed; Anne, in a soft minor, echoed the sob.

Whereupon the wondering trio clasped their hands in supplication, and demanded:

"Tell us, O Queen, what is man!
'Tis something we never have heard.
Is it a flower of sweetness rare?
Or is it a strange kind of bird?"

"Poor maidens," sighed Jane. "I never dreamed you were so ignorant. Listen!

"Oh, what is man?
Man is that wonderful dignified thing,

That we use when we need a president or king.
'Tis only for man that a woman buys clothes;
'Tis only for man that she powders her nose;
But man though he claims to be lord of the earth
Is ruled by a woman from the day of his birth."

And then Jane turned to Anne. "Tell them, my Albino Daughter," she sang in sad tones, "what you know about man."

In the opening line, Anne used the melody from "Way down south in Dixie," but soon changed it to the air of "Where is my wandering boy tonight?" And both airs were varied by giggles.

"Don't, Anne," Jane advised in a loud whisper. "You'll choke to death."

"Oh, what is man?
We do not know,
Our mothers all have told us so.
Sometimes our lord,
Sometimes our slave;
He makes us weep, and makes us rave."

There was a loud commotion from the alcove be-

hind the kneeling three. Anne paused. Jane clasped her shoulder, and cried:

"What's that I hear?
Oh, can it be
That I perhaps
A man shall see?"

From the curtains of the alcove sprang Betty, one hand in salute at her cap, the other twirling one fierce end of the crayola mustache. To the center of the group she stalked haughtily, and declared:

"I am the Creature you describe.
Behold in me lord of your tribe!
No more your isle will lonely be;
I'll make it buzz like a bumble bee."

Then the hero apparently saw the Queen for the first time. Awestruck by her beauty, he dropped on one knee before her and sang:

"Fairer than rose dawn or sunset;
More radiant than stardust or gold —"

A clear piercing tinkle cut the wooing short.

"Goodness gracious!" three girls cried in dismay. "I had no idea it was so late."

"Fifteen minutes yet till ten when the lights go out," said Jane. "Hurry, Betty, we can finish —"

"Hurry," advised the Albino Daughter worriedly, "because we never ate the candy yet."

"Where was I?" demanded Betty. "I lost the paper. What's next, Sarah?"

"Fairer than stardust —" prompted Sarah —

Betty continued: "Or gold,

"Is the sheen of thy wondrous beauty, O Queen!
My Queen of the Tropical Isle!"

"No more a lonely Queen!" sang Jane.

"No more!" vowed Betty.

"For I have come
To banish loneliness —"

"Girls!" cried Anne in a panic. "It's striking ten!"

"Oh, horrors!" cried Sarah, tearing off her borrowed raiment. "And they say our Miss Kennedy is the crossest matron of any dormitory."

"We haven't time to change our clothes," said Ruth. "Come — we'll race to our rooms, and get our things to-morrow."

The three visitors raced. Ruth's room was only three doors away. Sarah and Frances scooted around the corner and opened their door just as Miss Kennedy's firm step was heard in the adjoining corridor. Softly they closed the door.

"Will we have time —" Frances began.

"Should say not!" declared Sarah. "We'll have to get into bed just as we are."

Under the covers they crawled, silk kimonas, rouge and crayon, giggling softly until they heard Miss Kennedy pass by.

"We're not the only ones," chuckled Sarah. "Miss Betty Wyndham never had time to get that suit of your brother's off. I wish I'd brought some candy."

"I did," said Frances. "Here — I'll throw a piece over."

There was a soft thud on the floor by Sarah's bed. A moment later, she had found the yellow chunk and was munching happily.

CHAPTER VI

EMMELINE CERRITO ARRIVES

All the girls had dreaded Sunday. They had felt sure that a great wave of homesickness would engulf them. The tears which the busy week had not allowed would come in a flood Sunday morning when they would sit down to breakfast in a big alien dining room and remember, gulping sobs with their oatmeal, that the folks at home were just sitting down at the dear home table.

Even Ruth had a qualm at the thought of that breakfast and the long day that would follow.

But when the six girls jumped out of bed and looked at their rouged cheeks and darkened eyebrows, smeared into blotches by the contact with the pillows, a wave of laughter replaced the expected wave of homesickness.

Visiting before breakfast was strictly forbidden by the matron of the dormitory. But Jane Pellew ignored the rules, and slipped to the girls'

rooms with the shoes and stockings that they had not had time to collect the night before. By the time she had sorted Sarah's tan oxfords from Ruth's black kids, and successfully decided the ownership of the various stockings, while Betty peered out the door to watch the fun, a feeling of intimacy was established between the six that was never broken.

In the afternoon, Miss Kellar took about a dozen of the new girls for a walk. Betty did not go. She had letters to write. Ruth was glad to go. And of course Anne was always at Ruth's side. The other three, Jane, Sarah and Frances, went because they had nothing else to do.

"I wish Miss Drexal were taking us," Ruth said as they crossed the campus behind the north dormitory, and dropped into a broad path leading up the side of the hill. "It would have been a lovely chance to talk Camp Fire."

"Ruth," said Jane plaintively, "please don't ride your hobby all afternoon. Else I'll have to be 'savage maiden' again, and rend you in pieces."

Ruth laughed, although she flushed slightly. But she gave in to Jane. She didn't want to an-

tagonize any one at the start. And she felt that she could afford to wait.

So she busied herself taking careful view of the course they followed. The broad path soon gave way to several narrow zigzag ones. Now and then they came to a small stream that they could cross at a bound. It ran down and mingled with the creek below. Ruth's eyes glowed. She was planning innumerable "hikes." Just as soon as they had opportunity, she intended to take the Camp Fire group to the very top of the hill. She reveled in its steepness.

Miss Kellar was careful not to overtire anyone, and presently turned back. Ruth, and Jane also, who were used to active outdoor life, would have liked to stay longer.

In the evening all the new girls were asked to come down to the immense double parlors where Miss Belaire, smiling and kindly, saw that they were introduced to each other and to many of the older girls. It was an ordeal to Anne, who promptly sought a corner and clung there. But Ruth and Jane dragged her out. They were determined that she should lose her shyness.

So passed the first Sunday.

Monday they settled to the regular routine of the year.

By the latter part of the afternoon, when most of the day's lessons were over, the new girls sought the campus in front and dropped into adjacent wicker seats, or strolled about in pairs, their arms interlocked; comfortably conscious that the first tug of war was over. And most wore happy expressions, as though they anticipated a pleasant year.

"Why, there comes the bus!" cried Jane, who with Anne was lounging on a green settee near the front entrance.

Sarah and Frances were sprawled on the grass.

"It's Emmeline Cerrito!" Sarah cried excitedly. "She's the only one who hasn't come!"

"My! I'm anxious to see her," Frances chirped, and jumped up.

"Where's Ruth?" Jane demanded. "She'll be relieved —" with a giggle. "Now she can begin to civilize a genuine 'dusky maiden.' "

"Ruth is in her room, studying," said Anne soberly. "Dear! I hope Miss Cerrito won't be too — too awful. Poor Ruth —"

"You mean too — too ebony-hued," chuckled Sarah. "But I too say 'Poor Ruth.' "

The bus turned in the drive, and rattled up to the stone step. From every seat on the campus, interested eyes were turned to it. Some of the girls, bolder than the others, deliberately hastened up to get a closer view.

"I hope they won't ridicule her," Anne whispered to Jane. "She can't help her nationality."

When the bus had drawn up by the step, and carefully backed, there was a hush. Hiram, the grizzled colored driver, looked around. Then he got down from his seat and opened the door for his passenger. It seemed that she was too frightened to open it herself. At least, the girls assumed that to be her reason.

Then Miss Cerrito stepped out. She descended languidly, her chin raised at a lofty angle. There was no indication of fright or embarrassment in her attitude.

From the scores of girls watching and staring came a united gasp.

"Why!" cried Sarah, forgetting that the newcomer might hear her. "That isn't she! It's another girl!"

"There is no other girl to come," Jane retorted. "It must be Miss Cerrito. But, goodness!"

"I'm going to tell Ruth," chattered Anne. And off she ran, ducking into the entrance hall just in front of Miss Cerrito.

Up the stairs, down the long corridor and around the turn, Anne raced. She burst into the room where Ruth was composedly outlining her theme for the next day's rhetoric.

"Ruth!" she gurgled. "She's come!"

"Miss Cerrito?" Ruth tossed pencil and paper to the floor, and jumped up. "What is she like?"

"She isn't colored!" cried Anne. "Not a bit! She's as white as we are. And she looks just like Betty's pastel of Sarah Bernhardt. Only Miss Cerrito's not old, and she's not dowdy, and she's a hundred times better looking!"

"Really, Anne?"

"Really! And her clothes! My goodness! They're fine. Lots better than Jeannette or Blanche Shirly wear! I don't see how it can be Miss Cerrito, but everyone said it must be!"

"I wish she'd hurry up here." Ruth's eyes were shining.

"So do I. Ruth, you should have seen the way she swept out of that bus —" Anne by this time had lost her breath. She dropped into a chair, and rested until it came back. Then she continued.

"She walks —" Anne paused desperately for a comparison. "She walks as though she owned the whole earth, including this academy!"

Ruth anxiously began to pick up the sheets of paper that had been strewn over the floor. Then she smoothed the bed upon which she had been lying some time before, and fluffed out two silk-covered pillows on the window seat. She pulled the white ruffled curtains into more even folds, picked a stray hair from the dresser scarf, set the toilet articles at precise angles, and pulled a rocking chair forward to a hospitable position.

Then both girls sat down, and nervously waited Miss Cerrito's arrival.

She came presently, escorted by Miss Drexal, who introduced her and then left her to Ruth's care.

Emmeline Cerrito acknowledged the introduction with polite languor. Then she carelessly un-

pinned a chic blue chip toque that Anne and Ruth eyed admiringly, and tossed it to the bed. Her loose pongee traveling coat she flung after it.

"Frightfully warm — isn't it?" she observed.

Anne and Ruth exchanged glances of surprise. It was a very warm day for September. But surely in Nicaragua —

Ruth saw no better way to continue the conversation than by voicing her thought.

"Isn't it very warm in Nicaragua?" she asked.

Miss Cerrito was opening her hand satchel. She looked up wonderingly.

"Nicaragua!" she repeated. "Why, I'm sure I don't know. I fancy it is. Papa feared it might be. But I never was there."

"Oh!" cried Ruth and Anne in concert. "Then you're an American?"

A faint amused smile spread over Miss Cerrito's delicate face.

"Oh, no," she explained. "I'm French. At least, my parents are, and I was born there. But we came to the United States so soon after that event, that I'm able to pass for Americanese."

There was a slight deprecating inflection on the

last word that did not quite suit Ruth. Both she and Anne had a myriad of questions on their tongue tips, but good breeding forbade their utterance, at least on the first evening. But Ruth was diplomatic. She had the art of getting people to talk about themselves.

"It is awfully hard to leave one's mother for the first time," she essayed. "But we'll try to keep you from being too lonesome."

"Oh, I won't be lonesome," Miss Cerrito returned carelessly. "This isn't my first time. Papa left New York City to go to Nicaragua three years ago. Mamma was afraid the climate wouldn't agree with me so they sent me back to Paris to a girls' boarding school. Mamma was educated there. A horrid poky place. And strict! But I managed to do pretty much as I pleased."

She paused as her trunk was brought in, and then unlocked it. She drew out a lovely pink linen gown, made in older style than any freshman had so far worn.

Ruth and Anne went into ecstacies over it. Their outburst seemed to please Miss Cerrito. She allowed Ruth to help her fluff her brilliant hair into a big double knot.

'And now papa has decided to return to New York to live,'' she continued after a while, ''so he brought me here to stay until he has re-established our home in the city.''

''I hope it won't be right away,'' declared Ruth, who had fallen in love with her. She was very busy waiting upon her new roommate, buttoning her gown, hanging up the coat and hat, and making herself generally useful. Anne, cuddled in a chair, had never taken her wide eyes from Miss Cerrito's beautiful indifferent face.

''But I suppose,'' she continued, ''that you're just wild to be with your parents again.''

''Not exactly,'' Miss Cerrito returned indifferently. ''Oh, I'd like to see mamma — and papa. But I manage to get along very comfortably without them.''

To the two ordinary girls, Emmeline Cerrito was a strikingly unfamiliar type. One moment she was all vivacity, and her sentences came out in little quick bursts; the next she was languid, and drawled her words out in an indifferent manner. But both agreed, in a silent interchange of glances, that she was interesting.

"You youngsters aren't very old — are you?" she asked suddenly, perking her head sideways, and holding a handglass at the proper angle to get a view of her lovely back hair.

"I'm eighteen," said Ruth, amused, yet slightly piqued. But she was already sure that Emmeline was older than she. "And Anne's seventeen."

"So I fancied," drawled Miss Cerrito, with an inflection of patronage. "*I'm* nineteen."

She patted her hair, tucked up a stray whisp, and then rummaged in her trunk for an exquisite belt of silk cord shot with queer pink stones. As she clasped it around her waist, the dinner gong sounded, and Ruth and Anne escorted her down.

Dinner at the tables occupied by freshmen was an absent-minded affair. Everyone forgot to eat while covertly watching Miss Cerrito. She was undisturbed by the many eyes, and ate hungrily.

Afterward, Betty Wyndham and Jane came into Ruth's room. Their curiosity would not let them stay away longer. In order to make her feel at home, and acquainted, Ruth sent Anne to ask Sarah and Frances to join the crowd. She knew that the two Western girls were dying to come, but were kept away by diffidence.

"Would you like to come and meet Miss Cerrito?" Anne peeped in their door, and asked demurely. "Or are you too busy?"

"Too busy?" cried Sarah. She flung an algebra to a couch, and sprang up. "I should say not! But, Anne, is she — snippy?"

"Snippy?" Anne repeated, puzzled.

"You know, stuck-up — haughty — the kind that makes you feel as though you were sitting on the extreme edge of a hard chair?"

"She looks it," Frances said. "Maybe we better wait a few days. Doesn't she want to unpack to-night?"

"She isn't stuck-up," Anne said slowly. "Nor snippy — the way you mean. She's awfully interesting — and nice. But she's different from all of us. As for unpacking —" Anne giggled — "Ruth will do all her unpacking. And don't you want to come and see her clothes? They're simply dreams!"

Without parley, Sarah and Frances went.

Emmeline was stretched full length on the bed. She had changed the pink linen gown for a gay pink kimona, and her arms were clasped luxu-

riously above her pretty head. She raised herself on one elbow when the three girls entered. Then she languidly sank back.

"A railway trip always tires me," she explained.

Ruth was on her knees taking out the contents of Emmeline's trunk and transferring them to the drawers of the dresser and chiffonier. Miss Cerrito seemed uninterested in the operation.

Betty Wyndham and Jane sat on the window seat. For once, Betty found that she was not the central figure in the room. Her air of superiority had vanished. Another occupied the pedestal, and Betty took second place.

Both she and Jane seemed much impressed by the newcomer's clothes and careless air of patronage. Betty displayed none of the coldness she had shown Frances and Sarah, but was very eager to enroll herself as one of Emmeline's closest friends.

"We thought you were altogether different," Jane observed.

Ruth turned and gave Anne a warning look. Ruth herself had mentally berated herself for her unjust idea of Emmeline. She was alarmed

lest some one tell her before the novelty of fresh acquaintance had worn off. Later, it could be told, and Emmeline would probably laugh. But now it might make trouble.

"We thought," said Jane, regardless of Ruth's look, "that you were — "

"What a lot of books you have brought!" Ruth interposed. She took out an armful as she spoke. "All to study?"

"Horrors, no!" said Emmeline. "They're novels. Any of them you girls would care to borrow?" she added, generously.

Betty dropped to the floor, and eagerly picked two or three up. So did Jane.

"Oh!" cried both, disappointed. "They're French."

"Some of them. But part are in English."

Betty instantly began to sort out the English.

A decided little frown appeared on Ruth's face. By that time, she had put away all the clothes that Emmeline wished to take out of the trunk. So she coolly put the books back, and pushed the trunk into the closet. Betty, however, had kept one, and she abandoned the window seat for the foot of the

bed where she could become better acquainted with its owner.

"Do you like to go to the theater?" she asked in a precise, rather affected tone that caused Sarah and Frances to look at each other and smile.

"I never had much chance to go," yawned Emmeline, "except the few times that mamma came over to Paris and took me out. Once in a while, when I visited one of the girls at holiday time, her mother allowed us to go."

Emmeline spoke in bored tones — as though theaters were of little moment.

"Do you ride?" asked Jane who had also taken a position on the bed.

"What do you mean?" Emmeline wanted to know with languid curiosity. "Motor?"

"No, horseback," Jane returned, a bit impatient at such ignorance. To Kentucky-born Jane, riding could have reference to only the one thing.

"Oh, I do sometimes," yawned Miss Cerrito. "But I don't care for it unless I have a good mount."

Ruth wanted very much to ask what she did care for, but it was too soon, and there were too

many present for direct probing. She had already realized that the girl was most unpromising material for a Camp Fire member. But difficulty put Ruth on her mettle. She simply resolved the harder to change Emmeline's habits. Ruth was quite sure that the indifference and lack of healthy interest were only habits; not ineradicable traits of character.

Meanwhile Sarah, Frances and Anne sat silent; Anne because she was accustomed to leave the burden of talk to the other girls, especially Ruth. But Sarah and Frances were constrained. Between their open unaffected Westernism and the bored young lady on the bed, there was a radical difference of character. And presently they said good night and returned to their own room.

CHAPTER VII

THE SECOND MEETING

The next morning Sarah met Ruth in the corridor leading from the general assembly room to the recitation rooms.

"Ruth," she began, "have you asked her to join us?"

Despite the vague use of the pronouns, Ruth understood.

"No, of course not."

"I'm glad," decidedly. "I'd hate to take a hike with her. She'd get on my nerves. Although she is just as pretty as she can be," she said with ready generosity.

Ruth regarded Sarah gravely. But she refrained from reminding Sarah that her speech was not in accord with the laws of the Camp Fire Girls. For the cardinal principal of that organization is love, which includes service to everyone, whether likable or not.

"I don't think she is quite ready to be asked," Ruth said. "I'm waiting — until she is so fond of us that she will want to join."

"That won't be Saturday," said Sarah shrewdly.

"No. But," with quiet confidence, "it will be some Saturday before the year is up."

A second bulletin had been posted in the hall announcing the next meeting when applications for membership would be received.

But when Saturday morning came, Ruth was greatly disappointed. Emmy — so Ruth now called her — had detained her after breakfast. She wanted Ruth's advice on the hang of a skirt just received, and it was ten minutes after the appointed hour when Ruth hurried down to the big chapel.

When she saw that only three chairs of the many long rows were occupied, her face clouded. But she forced herself to assume a brighter expression before she joined Frances and Sarah, who were eagerly looking at Miss Drexal's short string of beads, red, brown and green.

"Where's Anne?" asked Frances. "Surely she hasn't brought Jane!"

"Not much danger of little Anne deserting," smiled Miss Drexal. "Here she comes!"

"And — goodness!" cried Sarah. "If she hasn't brought Jane!"

Ruth ran down the broad aisle to welcome Jane. The girl had never intimated any desire to join, or any interest. It was a great surprise. Every one wondered what necromancy Anne had worked.

But Jane explained her change of attitude in a very matter-of-fact tone.

"You see I've practically lived out of doors all my life. I was put on a horse's back — well, it isn't any use to tell you at what ridiculous age it happened, because you wouldn't believe me."

"We'd be polite enough to pretend to," Sarah assured her.

"And so I want to climb the hills with you," Jane continued. "And take walks, and go on expeditions, and all that sort of thing. And so, behold!" with a deep courtesy, "a new member of your august band!"

"Welcome!" cried Ruth gayly.

"Goody!" said Frances. "I'm sure now that Betty will join."

"Oh — well, I wouldn't count on that," Jane told her.

But Miss Drexal silenced the gay comments by calling the meeting to order. Then she stood in front of the row of eager faces, and explained very seriously to the three new members just what the organization was trying to do.

"It can be summed up in one sentence," she said at the close. "It aims to make healthy, sensible, serviceable women."

The jesting light left Jane's eyes as she listened. Under her breeziness lay a fund of genuine sensibility.

"I wonder," she murmured.

"Anything you don't understand?" Miss Drexal asked quickly as she caught the murmur.

Jane was looking steadily at Ruth. She flushed and shook her head. But afterward she confessed to Sarah that she wondered if Ruth got her good-nature and lovableness from this movement.

"Not altogether," laughed Sarah. "Ruth was born a bit better than the rest of us. But I daresay it has fostered her feeling of responsibility.

My! You'd think every one of us, even Emmeline, was a poor orphan chick, and she was a motherly clucking old hen."

And then both looked across the intervening chairs and laughed at the incongruity of the idea. For Ruth with her trim white shirtwaist and pretty gray skirt, her clean healthy color and sparkling eyes was not much like a clucking feathered hen.

By virtue of her age and authority, Miss Drexal was guardian of the group. But she explained that she was too busy to hold more than a nominal title. Ruth must be the real leader and director. The other four were fagot-bearers. Anne was wearing her costume, and the three girls examined it eagerly.

"Trim and neat and sensible," was the verdict given by Sarah and endorsed by the others.

Ruth was deputed to send in the orders for three outfits, including hat, blouse, bloomers and skirt.

Jane was delighted when she learned that the skirt could also be used as a riding costume.

"And the rings!" Anne cried. "Don't forget to send for those."

"Bracelets, too," said Jane. "I'm going the limit!"

"I'm sorry," smiled Miss Drexal, "but the bracelets come later, my dear. Those must be earned — as Ruth and Anne have earned theirs."

"How?" Jane demanded. "I didn't understand that part."

Miss Drexal told her soberly the things she must know how to do.

"Why!" gasped Jane, "when I have learned to do all that, I'll — I'll know all there is to do about a house — how to take care of children, put out a fire, and — and —"

"Oughtn't you to know?" Miss Drexal asked gently.

"Yes," Jane admitted after a moment of thought, "I guess I ought. And — " her snappy black eyes glowed like fire — "I'll have a bracelet very soon!"

"Next Saturday," said Miss Drexal, "we'll have a regular meeting. You will all be fairly well posted as to your duties."

"Shall we meet here?" Ruth asked.

Miss Drexal smiled. "Don't you want to take a hike?"

Five voices assured her tempestuously that they did.

"The valley on the north side of the hill just back of us is called Echo Valley," she told them. "It contains Sulphur Spring, which is worth a much longer walk to see. Near the spring lives old Jonathan Williamson and his wife. Their cabin is filled with curios, and is almost as picturesque as the spring. And perhaps he will tell you the legend of the Robbers' Cave."

"How perfectly lovely!" cried Ruth. All her first disappointment of the morning when she saw the almost empty chapel had been swept away by pure delight.

"Dandy, I say," said Jane. "Ruth, accept my thanks for bringing about this glorious affair."

"Shall we take our lunch?" Sarah demanded.

"We'll cook it," said Miss Drexal. "There is a pretty nook not far from the cottage, that is a favorite spot with picnickers. And the new members can begin to earn their bracelets."

"You mean?" Anne questioned gayly.

"By building the fire, and cooking the meal, of course."

"Feeling better?" Miss Drexal paused to ask Ruth in a low sympathetic tone as she passed out.

Ruth flushed a little. She did not know that the keen pleasant eyes of Miss Drexal had caught her deep depression at first.

"Yes," she acknowledged. "But for a moment I felt simply awfully blue!"

"Mustn't expect results too soon!" Miss Drexal warned her. "Anything worth while takes time. It is only mushroom plants and mushroom plans that spring up and get their full growth in a day. A grain of wheat takes the whole summer."

And then Miss Drexal softly quoted the lines of French:

"Be patient! Oh, be patient! Put your ear
against the earth;
Listen there how noiselessly the germ of the seed
has birth —
How noiselessly and gently it upheaves its little
way,
Till it parts the scarcely broken ground, and the
blade stands up in day.

Be patient! Oh, be patient! The germs of mighty
thought
Must have their silent undergrowth — must
underground be wrought.''

''Yes, I understand,'' Ruth said humbly. ''I don't think I'll feel that way again. Especially now that Jane has come over.''

CHAPTER VIII

EMMELINE'S TRAITS

It developed during the week that the amount of studying done by Miss Cerrito was almost none at all. She was taking a very superficial course in English and American literature, and a smattering of languages. French she was already proficient in, so that her lessons in that consisted merely in reading a few pages each day. In German she attended the recitations; that was all. She refused to bother her head over Goethe.

It became apparent that her father had put her in the school more to give her a place to stay than because he expected her to apply herself to books.

And she spent most of her spare time lying on a couch, nibbling candy and reading the innumerable novels that she had brought.

The care of the room, and sometimes the care of her clothes, she left to Ruth, as soon as she discovered Ruth's willingness to be of service.

But Ruth did not mind. She liked Emmeline, and she was willing to work for a return affection. So she hung up the hats and gowns that Emmeline tossed on the bed, put the empty candy boxes in the waste basket, and smoothed the pillows that Emmeline kept constantly disheveled.

Anne was the only one who objected. She was in Ruth's room more than any of the other girls, and so saw more of Emmeline's impositions. She forgot her usual shyness in her indignation over her beloved Ruth's situation.

"She uses you as if you were her maid!" Anne scolded.

"Why, I don't care!" laughed Ruth. "And it's just her way. She's as generous and good-hearted as she can be."

Thursday afternoon Ruth ran up to her room unexpectedly. It was her hour in the gymnasium, but she had a long essay to prepare for the next day, so she asked to be excused from the daily exercise.

Emmeline was sitting at the small table on which she kept her few books for study. She had an immense pad of white paper in front of her,

and she was scribbling furiously. At Ruth's entrance she seemed almost confused, an entirely new occurrence in Ruth's acquaintance with the listless young lady.

"Not working?" Ruth teased. "What is it — a theme?"

"No," briefly. "It's — just — " Her black lashes dropped over her dark blue eyes, and she chewed the pencil tip until Ruth summarily rescued it from demolishment.

"Of course, if it's a secret," Ruth said, "I don't want to pry."

But she could not keep the curiosity from her expression.

"Oh, I don't mind telling you," Emmy confessed. "It's nothing of any consequence. Merely a few pages that I've written."

"Emmy, do you really mean that you *write?*"

"Yes," with a reluctance that was half-affected. "I didn't intend to tell you. You see you younger girls probably can't understand the necessity of having an object in life. Something beyond dressing and joking."

She paused, and allowed time for her words to sink into Ruth's mind.

"Of course, if it 's a secret," Ruth said, "I don't want to pry."

Ruth straightened her lips. A smile would check the hard-won confidence. And she said demurely: "Maybe I can understand. Go on and tell me."

"Probably I am older than my nineteen years," Emmy said pensively. "Or perhaps I merely take more interest in the peculiarities of human nature than other girls of my age do. At any rate, I see and observe so much that I can't be contented until I have put it on paper."

She looked at Ruth gravely. "When you have that keen perception of the romance of life, you simply have to write. But of course, Ruth, you don't understand."

"Have you written much?" Ruth asked.

"Oh, yes," waving her hand toward the small desk where she kept her letters, "about twenty short stories; and three novels. The short stories are merely studies of incidents and people who have impressed me so that I had to describe them."

"Would you let me read some?" Ruth begged. "I won't tell any one —"

"Oh, I don't care if you tell. I have an idea

that the girls consider me a mere idler. You may correct the impression."

She handed Ruth the pages on the table before her. Ruth read them eagerly. Emmy watched her expression in order to read her opinion.

But Ruth had herself well in hand. It was a very romantic, high-flown romance, overdrawn and false in sentiment. But she soon saw that Emmy had a clever knack of twisting words. Some phrases were very clever. She had to laugh at one paragraph. It was a sharp bit of ridicule, and it clearly described the plump pouting Jeannette.

Emmy took the laughter as praise, and smiled in satisfaction. In spite of her high-sounding boast of seniority, she could not help knowing that Ruth was a very intelligent girl.

"Sometime I'll let you read another story," she said graciously. "A real romance."

Ruth expressed her appreciation, and then delved into her essay. Any sort of composition came hard to Ruth. As she puckered her forehead over the dry paragraphs, she wished that she had Emmy's facility without the element of romance.

"Ruth," said Emmy abruptly, "what is all this talk about 'savage maidens'?"

Ruth looked up from her essay to laugh. And then and there she told Emmy not only about the gay comic opera but about the girls' wrong impression of Emmeline's nationality and color.

Emmeline laughed. "What a joke! That explains what Blanche Shirly said one afternoon. I was lying in the hammock over by that big lilac bush, and she joined me. And she told me what a relief my appearance was to her and some others."

"Blanche was much worried."

"There was a girl in the school in Paris just like Blanche," Emmy continued.

Ruth let her pencil rest idly, and listened, rather unwillingly because she hated to waste the time that she had taken from gymnastics to work. But she hadn't the courage to ask Emmeline to keep still.

"Her name was Marie, and she had auburn hair. And she was just as boystruck—"

"Emmy!" cried Ruth. "How do you know Blanche is boystruck?"

Emmeline sprang up, and flung herself in a rocker. There she posed, her chin in one elbow-propped hand, a sad dreamy light in her eyes.

"Didn't you ever see Miss Shirly, in a fetching dress, her auburn ringlets arranged just so, seat herself in a wicker chair and gaze across the 'distant hills' to — Professor Leonard's school? And didn't you ever notice that every afternoon when the boys make for the village, she takes a walk that same way? You see, Ruth, I am more observant than you."

"Maybe," said Ruth. Then she bent sedulously over her essay. For Ruth observed many things that she was too charitable to tell.

"The funniest thing once happened to Marie," Emmy continued. "Am I bothering you, Ruth? Shall I keep still?"

"No-o. At least, I'd like to hear about Marie."

"She was the awfully romantic kind," began Emmy.

"What kind?" Ruth repeated with an odd tremor in her voice.

"The awfully romantic," placidly. "Of course, she wasn't like me. She didn't know *real* ro-

mance. She was a silly little thing, always gushing over trifles. A man used to pace up and down the street every day, once or twice. He was tall and thin, with big dark mournful eyes. We never saw him close, because he was on the other side of the street. The school was surrounded by an iron-meshed fence. Marie got it into her silly head that he was a scion of the royal family, who was now poor and obscure. She would stand as close to the gate as she dared — over there the matron is lynx-eyed — and the tears would gather in her eyes over his past grandeur and present misfortune.

"I believe she was going to ask her father to assist him financially; maybe help him back to his estate. Marie was an only child, and her father was wealthy. But she learned — what do you think?"

"I can't imagine," cried Ruth.

"He was a baker. The hot air of the kitchen had begun to dry up his liver, and the doctor ordered him to take a walk twice a day. Poor petite Marie! And she had been eating his buns for a year!"

Ruth laughed until the tears gathered in her eyes. And then she grabbed her pencil from the floor where it had fallen.

"I'll never get this essay written!" she cried.

"I won't bother you again," Emmy promised in deep contrition. "Say, Ruth, let me finish it for you!"

"No," Ruth refused. "Much obliged. But you see I'm weak in this stuff, and I need the practice."

It was five thirty before Ruth, with a tired sigh, leaned back. Emmy had snuggled on the bed, and was sound asleep, a novel half-clasped in her hand.

She stretched drowsily when the rustling of Ruth's papers awoke her.

"Done?" she yawned.

"Yes, thank goodness," Ruth declared. "I have squeezed from my mental anatomy and the encyclopaedia, fourteen hundred words concerning "The Abstract Value of a Pleasant Voice."

After dinner, Emmeline was in a gay mood. She wanted to talk, and Ruth was too small an audience.

"Let's go visiting," she proposed. "Betty will be glad to see us. She looked blue at dinner."

Ruth was willing. As they were leaving the room Sarah and Frances came down the corridor. So the four burst in upon Betty, Jane and Anne who were industriously studying.

"Throw your books under the bed," Emmy commanded. "You've got company. And if you don't entertain us prettily, we'll turn around and go right home again."

Jane complied with a rush. Anne followed more slowly.

Miss Wyndham sat up very straight, and pouted.

It was so startling a sight that the company was awed.

"Don't you want us?" Emmy demanded. "Say the word, ma chere, and we'll flit. Not for the world would I disturb a student!"

Emmy seemed transformed. Her eyes snapped until they equalled Jane's two sparklers. All her languor was gone, and she was so plainly out for a royal good time, that the others hoped devoutly that Betty wouldn't dismiss them.

Betty had no desire to study. She took her brown and black geometry, and pitched it viciously at the wall. Like Emmy, she was a complete contrast to her usual self. No one had suspected prim, collected Betty of a temper.

"I hate geometry!" she burst forth. "I fairly despise it! I don't see any sense to angles and theorems and axioms! And all I dream about is x y z plus a b c divided by m n p."

And then Betty began to sob into a small lace-edged handkerchief.

"Elizabeth Wyndham is next on the program with a lifelike imitation of a Niobe!" Emmy piped in a squeaking falsetto voice.

"Oh, what do you care, Betty?" Jane demanded scornfully. "She was just as mean to me the other day!"

"Meaning me?" Emmy wanted to know. "I beg your pardon —"

"No," said Jane disgustedly. "I mean that old hen with the hawk nose that teaches us mathematics — tries to, rather. As an explainer, she is about as poor as I ever saw."

"Oh, Jane," Ruth expostulated. "You oughtn't

to talk that way about Miss Melby. She has nervous headaches —"

"That's no reason for her ridiculing girls in the classroom. She said —"

"That I was a fo-o-ol!" wailed Betty. "Just because I forgot the difference between acute angles and obtuse. I didn't forget — I just said it wrongly. And she wouldn't give me time to think!"

"Never mind," Ruth said with quick sympathy. "Where are the problems? We'll work them. I finished geometry at the high school."

"No," said Betty firmly. "I don't want to look at them again to-night — I don't care if I never work them. Thank you though, Ruth."

"Thank you, Betty," said Emmeline with gratitude. "I do not feel geometrically inclined this evening. And of course if Ruth decided that you needed those problems solved, nothing would have saved us from solving them."

Jane and Sarah laughed outright at the allusion to Ruth's directing power.

"It's a very good thing that Ruth is here," Anne cried. Her cheeks were pink, and she

perked up her chin like a tiny bantam ready to fight. "Else some of us would be rather forlorn."

"So we would," Sarah laughed. "Ruth, we thank you —"

"Ruth!" mocked Emmeline, "consider that we are all grateful."

Ruth smiled at the chaff. Anne's defense was so amusing.

Then Emmeline perched herself on the foot of the bed.

"Give us a recitation, Betty."

But Betty was still lachrymose. She held the drenched handkerchief closer to her eyes, and sniffled. "I don't feel like reciting. Do it yourself."

"Very well, I will. Ruth, tell me — no, I know."

She took a position in the center of the room, and let her shoulders droop forward. Her chin fell down until it sagged against her neck. She drew her lips out till they made a wide unlovely gash in her face. She snatched Betty's pencil, stuck it in one corner of her mouth at a solemn angle.

"Hiram!" they shrieked with laughter. Anne

doubled up, and Jane's crescendo giggle pealed above all the rest.

Instantly Emmeline changed her expression. This time she ran her fingers through her beautiful hair until it was a frizzled mass. Then she pouched her lips out poutingly, and squinted her eyes toward her nose.

"I wish I was home!" she moaned. "I don't like the way they fix bread pudding here!"

"I wish Jeannette could see you!" Jane fairly howled.

Even Ruth, who didn't like to see fun poked at any one, had to laugh uproarously. And Betty's tears sparkled on her mirthful face like rainbow pellets.

"Young ladies!" came a stern voice from the other side of the door. There was a hard rap.

The laughter froze. Anne collapsed behind Ruth who looked disturbed. Betty's giggle wavered away. Only Emmeline retained her composure. Emmy was above rules and discipline.

It was Jane, crestfallen, who sidled toward the door, and opened it to Miss Kennedy, the matron of their dormitory.

Miss Kennedy was very tall, very forbidding, and, even when she was in her best humor, her voice was dry and metallic. Emmy had once said that it reminded her of rocks dropping on sheet iron.

Just now she was not in her best humor. She had black hair just sprinkled with gray, and cross green eyes. She always wore a plainly made black silk dress, and its very rustling inspired awe.

"I fail to understand," she said coldly, "why there is always so much laughter and screaming from this room!"

"I — we — didn't know we were so loud!" Jane stammered.

"I was at the other end of the dormitory!" Miss Kennedy said. "Really, I thought some one was hurt! You are young ladies! Not boys!"

She fixed accusing eyes first upon Betty who shriveled; then upon Ruth, who was crimson.

"I'm sorry!" all faltered. "We'll be quiet —"

"In your own rooms!" Miss Kennedy added coldly. "You will please retire immediately!"

"Certainly!" said Emmeline and marched out. The others followed, a meek crushed band.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST CAMP FIRE PICNIC

Saturday morning Ruth woke up with a feeling of pleasure. For a moment she wondered just what had brought the sense of unusual delight. The sun came in the windows in a glare of golden light. It was a beautiful morning; just the faintest tang of crispness in the air.

And then she remembered that to-day they had planned the expedition to Echo Valley. She jumped pellmell from bed, and spluttered into her cold bath, emerging a few minutes later as energetic as a compressed dynamo, and as pink as a rose.

Jane intercepted her as she hurried down to breakfast.

"Ruth," anxiously, "will it be all right for Betty to go with us to-day?"

"Why, I should say so! Has Betty decided —"

"Oh, she doesn't want to join us," hastily. "But she would like to go along as a guest."

"Of course," Ruth replied heartily. "I'm sure Miss Drexal won't care. The organization is so informal yet, and if she comes once she'll be more likely to join. And — of course —" Ruth spoke more slowly at a sudden thought — "we'll have to ask Emmy, too; it would never do to leave her out if Betty comes!"

At that moment Emmy was coming down the broad central stairs, and Ruth waited for her.

"Thank you," said Emmy calmly. "It is very sweet of you to ask me, Ruth, but I have other plans for the day. Besides I'm not *very* much interested in nature, Ruth. And I loathe steep hills."

Ruth was not offended by Emmy's patronizing refusal. She was too keenly thrilled by the good time coming to care strongly who shared it.

A gay little band set out, loaded with baskets for lunch. Miss Drexal and Betty took the lead. Ruth and Anne followed. The other three chattered gleefully in the rear. For perhaps a mile the path was level and straight; a long vista of smooth sand, shadowed by stunted pines. Along the sides blackberry brambles brilliant with yel-

lowed leaves, hazel brush loaded with nuts, and a gaudy assemblage of weeds, vied for first place.

"I wish the nuts were ripe," sighed Frances.

"It won't be long," Miss Drexal assured her. "And then we'll come prepared to gather plenty."

Then the path wound into a thicket of young trees, mostly pine, but with a sprinkling at its outer edge of young sugar maple. The ground was carpeted with the cones and needles, and the girls sniffed the odorous air delightedly.

Jane had her manual in her hand, and she was estimating the chances of her winning any honors that day. By building the fire and cooking lunch, she expected to win several wood brown beads. In a small notebook she was jotting a brief description of every wild flower they passed. That would presently entitle her to a sky blue bead. When Jane adopted any idea, she did it in no halfway manner. She had already out-distanced Sarah and Frances in enthusiasm. But they were realizing that fact, and ready to catch up with her.

When they had left the thicket, Sarah proudly displayed her jottings; the names and descriptions of five birds. "I'll have ten more before we go back to the school!" she boasted.

Jane looked at the list wistfully. She had not thought of that item. And then immediately her sharp black eyes went to the top branches of the stunted trees along the narrow path.

Then the path began to be very uneven. Betty said "Ouch!" more than once as the rocks cut her thin shoes. The other girls, though, had heavy calfskin and were immune to bruises. All frankly envied Ruth and Anne their trim skirts and blouses; the firm serge slid easily between the outjutting thorns and sharp twigs, and suffered not a single tear or fray.

"Next time you all will have your suits," Miss Drexal told them consolingly.

As they rounded a large low clump of dwarf oak which intervening shrubs and clambering vines had made impenetrable, the quaint vine-covered cabin came into view. It was made partly of logs, partly of rough boards; and had never known paint. But rains and snows and sleet had mellowed its gray outlines and the clambering vines, morning-glory, and a kind of ivy that none of the girls recognized, had completed the beautifying process. It stood just where the slope of

the hill sheered up from the valley. At its back it was protected from the north wind by a mass of grim, yellowish rock that stood as cleanly exposed as though some giant knife had sliced it smooth.

In front of the cabin the old man himself sat, fashioning a tiny canoe out of tree-bark. He was a straight, erect old fellow, holding his shoulders up as firmly as the slim young sapling in front of the cabin. But his white whiskers and thin wrinkled hands betrayed his age.

"Good morning, Jonathan!" Miss Drexal called.

"Good morning!" he called back cheerily.

Then at the low door appeared a tiny old woman. Like her husband, she was spry, and her eyes gleamed brightly between the old wrinkled creases of skin.

"We've come picnicking," said Miss Drexal. "And of course the girls want to hear that famous legend."

"I hope he won't refuse," Ruth whispered anxiously.

But old Jonathan had no idea of refusing. He got up proudly and shook hands with Miss Drexal.

"Sure — I'll be glad to tell it," he said. "It's cur'us how people do like to hear me tell that story. Why, I guess I've told it more'n a thousand times. Just run along and git your dinner ready, and while you're eatin' I'll get my pipe, and tell you."

"Folks say," he chuckled, "that it helps 'em digest their grub."

Without delay, they scampered to a spot a few rods farther that Miss Drexal pointed out. It was a bare stretch of sand fringed with yellowing grass. In its center lay a big flat rock, three feet long and nearly two wide, a perfect table. Beyond the fringe of grass lay another stretch of sand, and there a blackened spot indicated that other picnickers had built a fire.

From the flat rock they could see the spring. It was a lovely place. The crystal-clear water was circled by a white rim of sulphur deposit. Beyond this white rim the sand formed a tawny border; beyond the sand the grass lay in green and yellowish streaks. And over all a cluster of soft green pines cast a flickering shadow.

"Did you ever see anything so beautiful?" Ruth demanded in ecstasy.

"Yes," retorted Anne. "The ham sandwiches in that basket I just put down. And this coffee pot will presently hold the most gloriously beautiful fluid —"

"Oh, Jane, shame!" cried Anne.

But Jane was not ashamed. "I can't admire scenery," she maintained, "on an empty stomach; a ravenous shouting stomach. Wait till after we eat dinner, and I'll rave for an hour over this beautiful spot."

While Jane and Ruth were getting the water, Frances and Sarah were gathering twigs and fagots. Betty as guest of honor, coolly ensconced herself on a tuft of long grass, and watched them.

In a few minutes the fire was blazing. Jane had evidently been posting herself on the duties. In a trice she had propped some sticks above it and suspended a kettle in which to boil water. She called Ruth to witness that she was earning another bead.

Anne spread the cloth over the rock and distributed the spoons and forks. Knives had been dispensed with. They had brought bacon and eggs to cook. Jane had insisted upon those two

articles. She was anxious to prove her prowess with the fire. As soon as the water for the coffee boiled, they fell upon the bread and sizzling bacon as though they had not had a square meal for a week.

"I'd hate to have you folks as boarders," old Jonathan commented dryly. He had brought a small homemade chair out beside them, and began to tell the story.

"It wuz way back in the forties. Railroads wuzn't so plentiful then as they be now. Most folks did their travelin' by stage."

"So inconvenient!" remarked Betty. "I'd rather stay at home."

Jonathan flashed her a shrewd look. "We-ell," he said soberly, "I dunno as it was like riding in a palace car, but two stagecoaches never telescoped themselves inside each other so's the passengers had to be cut out with axes — unless the flames reached 'em first and made it onnecess'ry. Last time I went to Schenectady, there was a wreck. The durn old engineer — But I'm clean forgettin' my story.

"See that bend up the hill there — just where the road skims that steep incline?"

The girls sprang up, their mouths bulging with boiled egg, and stared at the spot. Miss Drexal alone did not move, but calmly continued to eat her sandwich. She smiled amusedly at the tempestuous uprising; as amusedly as though she did not witness its like every new term.

"Good gracious!" shivered Anne. "I wouldn't want to ride around there in a wobbly stage-coach!"

"That's where the Canadian Outlaw Band held up the coach! Old Peter Stockton who owned half this county had been down to New York buying his daughter a necklace and some other dewdads. It was her seventeenth birthday, and it seems he thought the world and all of her. They say she wuz as pretty as the first violet in spring. Yaller hair, pink cheeks — I guess she must have looked like that air little girl that's chewin' that monstrous dill pickle —"

Anne immediately dropped the pickle. The others shrieked with laughter at the red flood that swept over her pretty face.

"We-ell, the Outlaw Band heard about it — as they heard about everything else. Out they

jumped from that tall red rock — see it? — and yelled at Bill Murphy who drove the stage, to halt! Bill turned chalk white — but he would've halted all right if the blamed horses had been willing.

"But the poor dumb beasts got scared. They took one leap in the air, whirled around, and shot down the side of the hill. Old Peter was squashed — died before they picked him up. The outlaws swooped down, and got the necklace, and then fled up the hill.

"But they never had a chance to get out of the hills. Bill he had word to the sheriff as soon as he could cut the traces off the horses and gallop back. And the possee was at their heels before night. They chased them from hill to hill, and from rock to rock —" his voice dropped sepulchrally — "and from tree to tree."

"How lovely!" sighed Frances.

"Huh!" said old Jonathan. "Well, call it that if you want to. And at last they drove 'em into the cave. And then the shootin' commenced. First the Outlaws would poke their guns through the opening and pepper the scenery. And then the possee would fire at the opening.

"The walls of that cave are sprinkled with white spots where those bullets spatted. And finally," mournfully, "the Outlaws fell, one at a time. When two days had passed, and nary a shot came from the cave, the possee sneaked closer, fired a last volley inside, in case any of the varmint wuzn't killed yet —"

"Oh, how perfectly dreadful!" cried Ruth and Betty. The others were shocked beyond speech.

"Well," defensively, "they *wuz* varmint; they ought to be killed."

"And *were* they dead?" Anne breathed in horror.

"Deader'n doornails," cheerfully. "Sprawled all over the bottom of the cave like a bunch of strangled chickens, legs doubled up under 'em, blood smeared —"

Miss Drexal interrupted more grewsome details. "Thank you so much, Jonathan. And now we must clear away these remains." She began getting together the spoons and forks. Jane, ever mindful of the beads she must earn before she could win a bracelet, rushed away with the frying pan to cleanse it at the spring.

Miss Drexal had intended to return to the school immediately after they had lunched. She had work to do, and could not spare the whole day. The girls were to finish the expedition by themselves.

Now she prepared to leave. Before she went, she looked with some disquietude at the sky. The old story had been so interesting that no one had noticed the change in the sky. The golden sunshine of early morning had vanished. Gray clouds were slowly covering the sky.

"I'm just wild to see the cave!" Sarah declared.

"I don't think you better try to make it to-day," Miss Drexal told them reluctantly. "Those clouds are rather heavy. Of course, they may not mean rain —"

She looked about regretfully at the circle of disappointed faces.

"Oh, Miss Drexal," Jane cried forlornly, "we surely don't have to go back right away?"

"I don't believe it will rain for several hours," Ruth said. "Those clouds are the skimmy kind that don't keep their promise."

"Perhaps," Miss Drexal admitted after a second careful look. "You needn't return with me, but I wouldn't go any farther than that little brown booth halfway up the hill. Next time we'll go directly to the cave."

CHAPTER X

A DISASTROUS ENDING

The approach of the booth and the remainder of the ascent to the cave was so steep as to be precipitous. Sometimes the zigzag path went straight up, and they had to pull themselves up by the tough saplings that outjutted from the side of the hill. Then came a stretch of sandy soil that crumbled beneath their feet and they almost lost their foothold.

But they clambered on, laughing breathlessly. Betty in her thin shoes fared the worst. Ruth gave her a helping hand part of the way. Finally they reached the brown booth; a sort of rest house with a few seats made of slender oak branches. Some one had erected it that picnickers might have a place for lunch or refuge in case the weather proved traitor, as it had to-day.

Far above, like a dark blotch, the opening of the cave appeared. The six girls eyed it long-

ingly. And just then, the sun shot from behind the grayest cloud, and sent a shaft of yellow light through the crevices of the booth's lattice work.

"Hurrah!" cried Betty. She jumped up and pirouetted in joy. "Who said rain? Come — on to the cave!"

"It would take an hour to get up there and back," Ruth told her. "I don't like to risk it. Especially after Miss Drexal warned us."

"Nonsense!" scoffed Betty. "The sun wasn't shining then."

"But — " she began worriedly.

"Oh, come on, Ruth," urged Jane. "Why, those clouds will hang in a sky for days, and never shed a drop. We simply can't go back now that we've come so far!"

"And Miss Drexal didn't say we mustn't go," Betty carefully explained. "She said only that we better not. If the sun had come out before she left — "

"Very well," Ruth finally conceded. But she did so reluctantly. There was an ominous tinge of brown to the gray clouds.

The minute Ruth gave the word, the girls

bounded up the steep path. She was commanding officer of the Camp Fire group. Except Betty, all were subject to her orders, and so could not have proceeded against her command.

The path above the rest house was steeper than below. As they ascended, the path stretched up and around the base of a cluster of broken cliffs. For a way there were no saplings or shrubs to cling to. But they panted up. A turn shut the rest house below from their view. Then they passed the cliffs, and gained a sort of smooth knob of green tufted ground. From that point, they could see the brown lattice work of the booth below, and the gloomy opening of the cave above.

Suddenly a large drop fell upon Ruth's cheek.

"Girls!" she cried in dismay. "It's raining!"

A quick patter confirmed her cry. Aghast, the girls cowered back against the cliff.

Ruth hastily decided upon the best course. The rest house was too far to reach without a drenching. The cave was nearer.

"Come on," she ordered, and caught Betty's hand to pull her up the last bit of steep rock.

All ducked their heads to escape the drizzle, and

ran, tumbling as fast as possible into the cave. There, with a gay laugh, they shook themselves; they were only slightly wet.

The cave was small, not more than ten feet in depth and about five across. The sides formed a rounding peak in the center of the roof. Just now, while the sky was clouded, the interior was dark. But they were completely sheltered, and that was the most important thing just then.

Very troubled, Ruth sat near the opening and watched the sky. At first she was sure that the drizzle would be very light, and over in a few minutes. But it did not lessen. It grew heavier, and she began to be worried.

"Ugh!" shivered Betty. "I'm cold. Let's make a fire. You Camp Fire Girls should have thought of it first!"

She drew a few sticks from the floor, swept in perhaps by the winter winds. Then she began industriously to gather all the leaves and rubbish that littered the floor near the entrance.

"Let me build it," coaxed Jane, "so I can earn a bead."

"Shan't!" declared Betty. "You should have thought of it first. That is my job."

Ruth produced the matches, which she carried in a small bag that hung from her belt.

"Six poor marooned ladies,
Snuggled close in a cave,
Cold rain all about them,
And no one to save!"

Frances light-heartedly chanted while Betty coaxed the leaves to burst into flame. Sarah and Jane crossed their feet Turkish fashion and held their hands out for warmth, for the cold rain made all feel chilly.

Ruth did not share the others' gayety. As commanding officer, she blamed herself for allowing the girls to come so far, and when the rain did not cease, she was seriously alarmed. Finally all the available twigs and dead limbs were consumed. The leaves alone did not burn well, and, as the fire was just outside the entrance of the cave, a thick gust of smoke arose. The cold air outside drove it back in the cave, making the girls choke and cough.

"I'll go out and forage," Ruth announced when

the last red ember of dry fagot was turning black.

"So'll I," cried Sarah, Jane and Anne.

"No," ordered Ruth. "You can't. Anne takes cold too easily. And the rest of you aren't dressed correctly. This blouse and skirt are almost rain proof. Jane, that white linen waist would be soaked in a minute. So would Sarah's."

They protested. But she had her way, for all had to acknowledge that she spoke sensibly. So she turned her outing skirt over her head to protect herself. The blue serge bloomers that completed the Camp Fire costume were of the same durable, close-knit material as the blouse and skirt. The rain had not penetrated the close tangle of vines in a thicket just beyond, and she was able to get a large armful of dry wood in a very short time.

But she brought four armfuls before desisting. Meanwhile the rain steadily gained strength.

"But it'll cease presently," Anne kept saying brightly.

"Of course!" Jane declared stoutly, "There's a rift up there in the west."

"Sing us something, Anne," begged Sarah.

"Oh!" Anne demurred. "Let's all sing. Something lively."

"Away down south in Dixie," caroled Jane.

"Away! Away!"

"Mercy!" cried Betty. "Sing, somebody, and cover up that voice!"

With a racket that threatened to lift the roof of the cave, they joined in. Ruth kept the fire well supplied with wood. She had to push it to one side of the entrance on account of the smoke. There an upright rock half-protected it, and a vine that straggled from above the cave and wandered, serpent-like, to the rock, completed the wind-break.

"Jane!" cried Sarah when "Dixie" died away, "tell them about that time you rode a horse your father had forbidden you! And what happened."

Even Ruth forgot her worry over the situation as Jane, with a preliminary giggle, settled herself to tell the story.

"You know my father," she explained, "doesn't like to see me on anything but a decrepit, twenty-year old mare who couldn't get out of a walk to save her skin. He bought a lovely pony. Oh,

just a dream. Its coat was like brown satin, and it had great sad tender brown eyes. Let me give you a piece of advice, girls," seriously. "Don't judge a horse by the tender look in its eyes — you'll get fooled.

"This pony was blooded. You know, my father is interested in races, and he bought this as a world's record breaker. He expected to train the imp. So," with a giggle, "I thought I'd help him. My brother Bob is a nice obedient boy. He never dreams of disobeying my father, so I had to dodge Bob as well as the stable boys.

"But I got the pony out to a back field, and mounted him. Why, those four heels were like firecrackers. They simply crackled over the ground."

"Were you thrown?" Anne gasped.

"Was I thrown?" Jane repeated. "My child, I went off that pony's back so quick, I never knew I was on! I hit the top board of a fence. That took the skin off my cheek. Then I hit the ground. That drove my collar bone nearly against my spine. I ached for a month. The pony ran away. My brother Bob caught him and brought him home

the entrance in order to get as much warmth as possible.

She was just in time. The drizzle gave way to a furious torrent of rain that poured over the rock, and beat down the protecting vine. Betty, Jane and Sarah had very thin white waists on. And none of the girls were clad warmly enough for the chilliness that now fell. Ruth was very much alarmed, and she blamed herself bitterly. And, since no one would have been up there if she hadn't given the word, she felt it incumbent upon herself to get them back to the school before night fell. But she was perplexed and worried.

The darkness deepened. All gayety had left the girls, and they crouched together in forlorn silence. The torrent soon gave way to a hard, steady downpour. Ruth peered out, and saw, far below, the light gleaming in the cabin by the spring. That decided her. She jumped up, and tucked her skirt over her head.

"It is much better for one of us to be drenched than for all to pass a night of suffering," she told them. "So I am going down to the cabin, and get some blankets or wraps. I will send Jonathan to the school for the bus."

"Not alone, Ruth," cried several impetuous voices.

"I'm commanding officer," said Ruth decisively. "And I order all to remain here!"

Her voice held a tone that brooked no protest. But Betty insisted. "I'm not a member. As a guest I don't have to take orders. So I'm going with you."

"Betty!" Ruth said firmly, "you could hardly get up in daylight when the path was dry, with your thin shoes. Why, I'd have to carry you down!"

"I can change with Jane —"

"No!" ordered Ruth, and ran out into the rain.

CHAPTER XI

THE RESCUE

The path had been difficult in the light. In the darkness, with the clay washed into slippery streaks by the rain, and the sand a mass of wet ooze, it was almost impossible. After Ruth had passed the smooth knob of tufted ground, now a wet slushy spot, and groped her way around the cliffs, she hesitated about proceeding farther. With all her dauntlessness she was appalled.

But she could not go back to the huddled, crying girls, and stay there all night. So she took firm hold of the dripping saplings and let herself down — down — till finally she reached a point where the path ran on a level for about a rod. And there at the easier part, she came to grief. Her foot, digging for a hold in the jelly-like clay, could not find it. She slipped, fell face foremost down the path, and burrowed in the slushiness.

There were only two things to do; either cry

or laugh. A sob choked its way up. Ruth choked it down, and laughed. It was a faint tremulous laugh, it is true, but still a laugh. She scrambled to her feet and struggled on. As the path became more steep, she could not keep in it, but had to clamber along the edge where the long wet tangled grass and rocks gave her more foothold. She was afraid of getting away from the path and losing her way, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground. And meanwhile the rain never ceased its hard downpour.

Her clothes were drenched. The skirt which she had turned over her head became soaked, and the water dribbled down her cheeks. She could not loosen her hold of one sapling or branch until she had reached down and caught hold of another; else she would have fallen again, and by that time no laugh could have been possible.

At the bottom of the hill, the light of the cabin by the spring still gleamed. Otherwise she must have lost her courage, and also her way. But she kept her bearings by means of it. And finally, panting, almost breathless, she reached the rest house. There, she dropped into the rustic seat for

a minute. She could go no farther without a short rest.

But she started up in alarm at the sound of voices just below; several men were shouting. The story of the outlaws came back to her, unnerved as she was by the darkness and the dangerous descent, and she wished that she had allowed Betty or some one to accompany her.

A swinging lantern appeared, and then a group rounded the bend and rushed up to the booth. She caught a voice that could belong only to old Hiram; then Miss Drexal's worried tones were mingled.

"Oh, Miss Drexal!" Ruth cried, half-sobbing, and stumbled forward.

"Oh, you poor child!"

The other forms pressed up. She heard another familiar voice — and then another. The two boys who had picked up the magazines at the station, with three others, were loaded with rubber coats and blankets. While Miss Drexal wrapped Ruth up, and helped her wipe the wet clay from her face, they explained that they too had been caught by the rain, but had managed to make the cabin. Old

Jonathan supposed that the girls had descended and gone back to the college long before. He did not know otherwise until Miss Drexal arrived in the bus, frantic with anxiety.

"Or we'd been up after you hours ago," said the boy whose freckles reminded Ruth of her brother.

"Shut up, Howard," said Lafe. "Don't bother her."

Lafe was tucking a flannel-lined mackintosh about her wet shoulders. She snuggled in it delightedly. The feel of that warm flannel was good. She smiled; a grotesque smile considering the clay that still smeared her cheeks. Miss Drexal's handkerchief had not been wholly efficacious, for wet clay is hard to wipe off.

"Some nerve?" Howard whispered admiringly to the next boy.

"Come on," said Ruth brightly. "The girls will be so glad! They don't expect me back for a long time."

"Not you!" Howard Pelton declared.

"I should say not!" Lafe cried indignantly.

"Of course not," Miss Drexal decided. "You will remain here until the girls are brought down."

Ruth would have objected. Not that she was keen on climbing that slippery path again, but her sense of conscientiousness made her feel that she ought to share every bit of the discomfort of the affair. However, Miss Drexal silenced her as she herself had silenced the girls who would have accompanied her down for help.

"I'm your commanding officer," she reminded her, "and I order you to stay here."

"And you too, Miss Drexal," Lafe Grinnell said. "Really, we fellows can get up more quickly by ourselves."

But Miss Drexal would not listen to that. The girls were under her care, and she considered herself responsible to their parents for their safety. Besides, she knew every foot of the path.

So Ruth pulled the mackintosh close about her, and waited while they pushed on and up in the darkness. She could catch the gleam of the swinging lanterns, and she could imagine the squeals of relief that the five girls would emit.

Her imaginings were not wrong. Anne was crying with all her might, as much on Ruth's account as her own. Betty's teeth were chattering

so that she could not cry. Jane had snuggled up to Anne, and put both arms around her. Sarah and Frances pulled Betty over, and the five were a close, forlorn, cold band. The wind swept down from the summit of the hill and snarled past the door of the cave, drowning the voices of the rescuing party.

Lafe Grinnell's lantern as it swung in the opening was their first intimation of rescue. They tumbled out into the rain that now had dwindled to a drizzle, laughing and crying. At sight of the boys Betty primly drew herself up, and stopped crying. But the others did not care.

Miss Drexal introduced them to the boys. Arthur Murray, a big broad-shouldered fellow with black hair and eyes promptly took possession of Anne, and started down with her. Anne was so glad to be sure that she would not fall that her usual shyness disappeared. Jasper Whitney, a tall serious boy with an intellectual face and glasses held his arm out to the nearest girl. It happened to be Sarah who, with an independent toss of her head, started off by herself; only waiting to be wrapped in a blanket by Miss Drexal.

But Jasper at once strode after her, and took hold of her arm.

"Do you want to slide down nose first?" he asked soberly. "Your friend, Miss Garnier, did, I guess."

"Goodness!" screamed Betty. "Poor Ruth!" And she clung with both hands to the arm offered her by Lafe.

Billy Randolph was a short stocky fellow with eyes that twinkled even in the dim light of the lanterns. Afterward they learned that those eyes were green, that his hair was a brilliant red, and that his nose turned squarely up. But with a flannel-lined mackintosh in his hands, he seemed to Jane to be a delightful vision. Howard put a rubber coat around Frances, and with Miss Drexal and Hiram who was muttering to himself about the foolishness of "folks that ain't got sense 'nough to come home when it wuz rainin'!" the whole party was started downward.

By the time they reached the rest house and Ruth, all the fright of the afternoon had been forgotten and they were laughing at the mishaps of the descent.

They laughed more when they beheld Ruth's face. For the clay had dried, and now would not come off without soap and water. With gay good humor, she described her sliding act, and told them exactly how it felt to taste clay.

"Ugh!" shuddered Anne, slipping her hand within Ruth's. "Next time I won't let you go alone!"

Lafe managed to take care of both Ruth and Betty as they finished the journey to the cabin where the bus was drawn up. They scrambled in, bedraggled, shivering, but in gay spirits. They called good-bye to the boys who were striking across the valley to their own school, and who roared back a hope that no one would take cold.

"I hope the same," Miss Drexal said worriedly. "Anne, pull that blanket up close about your throat."

Ruth reached over and tucked it up. She shared Miss Drexal's apprehension. "If you get sick, Anne —" she began.

"My dear Ruth," interposed Miss Drexal, "you're more likely to feel the effect."

"Oh," carelessly, "I feel fine — and hungry."

"I," said Jane earnestly, "am simply famished."

Then the bus drew up at the steps of the college, and they hurried out and up into the warm lighted hall where Miss Belaire was anxiously waiting to be assured that they were all right.

"A hot bath at once," she ordered, "and plenty of quinine."

"I wish we could have supper first," Jane whispered to Betty.

But the bath came first. Emmeline helped Ruth change into dry clothes, and was very concerned. Ruth was not talkative. She had expected to tell Emmy what a glorious day they had spent, and so inspire her with a desire to join their next expedition. But this ending was not the sort to tempt Emmy to the pleasures of outdoor jaunts. So she could not say much.

"My!" Emmy exclaimed. "I couldn't sit still all afternoon, thinking of you poor things out in all that storm! Didn't you notice the clouds?"

"Yes," Ruth admitted. "And Miss Drexal warned us. It was really my fault," contritely. "But we've learned a lesson. After this we'll pay attention and not trust to luck."

"Supper's ready in the dining room," Jane put her head in the door to say. "Coming, Ruth?"

Anne and Betty were just behind, pink and shining from the steam of the bath, and ready to eat — "A horse!" Betty vowed. "At least a quarter of a cow!"

Frances and Sarah were already at the table. Miss Drexal had missed her dinner when she went in search of the girls, so she joined them.

The first whiff of the hot soup drove away every thought of past hardship. When the roast followed, the six girls were reliving the afternoon as though it had been a time of delight instead of wretchedness.

"It's nice to be cold and scared," Anne said reflectively.

"Listen!" laughed Jane and Ruth in unison.

"A new discovery!" mocked Sarah. "Shall we go back and spend the night in the cave?"

"It is," Anne stoutly declared. "Because when it's over, you feel so good and contented!"

"Listen to the wisdom of a cave dweller!" cried Jane, waving her napkin. "Who says we cannot learn from misfortune?"

"Cave Dwellers! That's a splendid name!" Frances declared. "The 'Savage Maidens' have

metamorphosed — or had a reincarnation. From henceforth, we are 'Cave Dwellers'!"

"So be it!" said Ruth. "And our watchword is —"

"Clay!" laughed Jane.

"Just now it is bed!" laughed Miss Drexal rising.

CHAPTER XII

EMMELINE IS NURSE

In the morning, only Ruth showed any ill effects of the outing. When she woke and tried to get up, she found that every joint pained her. Her eyes were heavy, and her head ached. Also, her skin was dry and hot.

While she was dressing, Miss Drexal entered. She had visited the other five, and found them fit for school work. As soon as she laid her hand on Ruth's hot forehead, she ordered her back to bed, and telephoned for a doctor in Hillside.

"Fever!" he announced. "And a chill!"

He had little sharp black eyes that gleamed fiercely from his shaggy gray eyebrows. "Stay in bed all day," he commanded. "People can't go chasing around in rainstorms and not be sick!"

"Some people can," Ruth told him. "The others did."

"No impudence, young lady," he warned her,

shaking a long forefinger, and trying not to smile. "Or you'll stay in bed a week."

The girls came in a body immediately after breakfast to sympathize.

"But it's lucky you're not sick enough to be sent to the infirmary," Betty tried to console her. "Here, we can run in between every class period and see you. So you won't be lonesome."

"I will cut my classes to-day," Emmeline announced, "and nurse Ruth."

"Oh, Emmy, you mustn't!" Ruth protested. "You don't want to miss your recitations."

"I don't mind," Emmeline grinned.

"Are you sure, Emmy?" Jane asked mischievously. "Can you endure the great loss to your mentality?"

Emmy snatched a whisk broom and chased her from the room.

"If you're late at chapel," she called, "Miss Belaire will investigate your mentality, Miss Impudence Pellew!"

"I'll be up right after mathematics," Anne told Ruth as she bent over to kiss her. "And I do hope you don't get worse."

When the girls had departed for the various recitation rooms, Emmy proceeded to dress for the part she had assigned herself. She got out a white duck suit, plainly made. Then out of a dainty white apron, she fashioned a perky little cap such as nurses wear. Another apron she fastened jauntily about her waist.

She lowered the shades so that the room was dim.

"Say, Emmy," Ruth ejaculated, "I'd rather be in a hospital devoted to the sunshine method."

"You mustn't dictate to the nurse," frowned Emmy. But she raised the shades six inches.

Then she took a sheet of white letter paper and neatly ruled it into columns: one for temperature, one for symptoms and one for remarks. This she tacked on the wall at the head of the bed. Then she put a thermometer in Ruth's mouth.

"Take it out!" cried Ruth. "It's been in that drawer until it's dusty!"

"Delirious," Emmy wrote in the symptom column:

"Emmy," said Ruth coaxingly, "you promised to let me read one of your stories — that long one. Let's have it now."

Emmy considered. "I don't think you ought to strain your eyes."

"Then you read it to me. Please. It will be," dolefully, "it will be such a long day!"

Ruth was a poor hypocrite. The doleful tone was plainly affected. And Emmy saw straight through the pretense. For already her white suit and assumption of high-handed tyranny had brought an appreciative sparkle to Ruth's eyes.

But she yielded, and got the bundle of scribbled sheets.

"I'll read it," she graciously decided.

"How dear of you!" Ruth cried joyously, and immediately twisted herself in the most comfortable position she could assume.

When she read the other shorter story, Ruth had learned that Emmeline had a penchant for locating her romances in parts of the world that she had never seen. So she was not surprised when the story started out with a fanciful description of Canadian woods. The title was "A Woman's Whim."

"Gaunt trees, stretching out vast arms to the cold blue sky — glaciers, whose white peaks tow-

ered into limitless space — rivers, whose chill waters bore countless gay canoes —''

In an overdrawn way, the description showed that Emmy had talent. Ruth was really interested in the story.

A young Englishman, handsome — Emmy dwelt upon that point — brave, and driven from home by a cruel step-father, has crossed the sea and stumbled into the trackless wilds of the Canadian woods. There he is lost. Food gives out, and he can find no more except a stray rabbit or two that he succeeding in cornering, and eats raw. After that he has wandered for many days, and is almost overcome by hunger.

Finally he collapses. It is at the close of day. The western sky is gorgeous; red and gold and purple mingle in opalescent radiance. He sinks down on the bank of a river, and prepares to die. Then suddenly, from the woods behind him appears a beautiful Indian maid; tall, with lovely brown eyes, and clear copper skin. Ankles and arms are bound with gorgeous strands of beads. About her waist hangs a belt of wampum. Her moccasins are brilliantly beaded. Her garb is

of furs. Two long braids of black hair, in which beads and brilliant feathers are twisted, hang to her knees.

She picks up the worn, starved Englishman, bears him in her strong arms to her father's camp, which is just across the river. Her light feet glide over the icy surface of the stream with the sure footing of a deer. In her wigwam, with the help of an old brown squaw, she nurses him back to strength. Her father is chief, but he is old, and about to die. Since his daughter loves the young white god, and he has no son, he makes him chief of the tribe.

Sir Chauncey — for that was his name — immediately plans for conquest. He is a brilliant ruler. The obedient, uneducated savages are moulded into clever warriors. They conquer the surrounding tribes, and become a mighty nation. Sir Chauncey with his high headdress of feathers, his fur robes, and mighty muscles scarcely resembles the good looking young Englishman whom the Indian girl saved. As he grows older, he seems to become harder and more savage than the Indians he rules.

And finally she ceases to love him. A younger warrior, with jet-black eyes that "seemed to emit sparks of lightning" looks at her with eyes of love. And she, faithless, does not rebuke him. There are secret meetings when "the pale glistening moon, floating behind a veil of fleecy clouds, sends flickering shadows among the tall pines. And ever the pines bend sadly before the wind, sighing, sobbing their knowledge of the coming tragedy."

At last she flees with her Indian lover, one dark midnight when black clouds hide the pale moon. Through the trackless forests, past the ridge of mountains, down to the great lake, they go. No one ever saw them again.

Sir Chauncey, when his messengers come back, spent, their quest fruitless, sits apart in somber silence, day after day. The warriors are idle, waiting his command; the squaws hang about in awed groups. Finally he rises, stalks through the vast woods until he reaches a mighty mountain of sheer cliffs. From the highest cliff, he flings himself down — and his body is whirled away in the stream below.

After his death, the warriors lose their cleverness and their bravery. The tribe is conquered where it had been conqueror. And finally it becomes a handful of weakling savages — all because of "a woman's whim."

At the close, Emmy looked up expectantly. Ruth was nonplussed. The praise that Emmy so evidently expected was hard to compose. And Ruth had a very tender regard for people's feelings. But it had been so very high-flown — that long, romantic tale.

"Canadian woods are beautiful — aren't they?" Ruth tactfully remarked. "One can imagine them the scene of almost any fanciful legend. You have such an intense appreciation of nature's beauties, Emmy, I wonder that you do not get out more and view it at first hand, instead of just through your imagination."

"Pouf!" And Emmy shrugged her shoulders in her lazy fashion.

"I visited once in northern Canada," Ruth went on to tell her. "I have an uncle there, a farmer. The river that flowed past his wheat fields led farther north to an immense stretch of woods.

And the logs were sent down it to the city miles below. It was great fun to watch them. Sometimes cold weather would come on suddenly, and then the freezing water would hold the logs fast till spring. The lumbermen are great, huge-muscled fellows. I fancy they could overpower even your "mighty warriors."

Emmy looked thoughtful. Ruth's sudden plunge to ordinary present-day living made her slightly conscious of the almost farcical romance of her pages.

"Don't you like my stories, Ruth?" she asked dejectedly.

"I think you have a great deal of talent," hastily. "But, Emmy, these hills back here are just as beautiful —"

"Slush!" said Emmy. "Those — runts!" Rather offendedly she gathered up her papers to put them away.

"They are," stoutly, "in their way. But, Emmy, common people have more genuine romance in their hard-working lives than you know."

"Perhaps they have," Emmeline acknowledged after a while.

"And you can foster your ambition to be a writer —"

"I used to have another ambition," Emmeline interrupted sadly. "But I had to give it up."

There was no affectation in her manner now. The bitterness of her voice was genuine, and interested Ruth. She sat up in bed.

"Tell me about it."

Emmeline needed persuasion. And when she at last yielded, it was more because her mood demanded outlet than because she really wished to confide in Ruth.

"I want to be a great singer," she said in a very hard tone. "And I could — if my father would let me. Oh, I'm not boasting, Ruth. As for those stories, I never have been proud of them. They were written merely to kill time, and give me something to think about.

"But I have taken lessons ever since I was a little girl. Over in the boarding-school in Paris, the teachers told my father that my voice would justify training; that it was very flexible and had a remarkable strength and sweetness. He was very much pleased" — with a curl of her upper

lip — "and as soon as I was old enough, he sent to Louidi, one of the greatest teachers in Paris. A year afterward, my lessons stopped. Louidi said that it was a shame!"

"Why did they stop?" Ruth asked wonderingly.

"My father would not let me take any more," curtly.

"How could he be so cruel?"

"Oh," wearily, "he does not mean to be cruel. He thinks he is kind. He said that he did not care that his daughter should be an opera singer."

"Sing something," begged Ruth. "I'd love to hear your voice."

Emmeline was silent a moment; sitting on the edge of the bed, her hands clasped in her lap. Her eyes were very wistful. Ruth thought again, as she had many times before, what a clear, beautiful profile the girl had. Then she began to sing, a plaintive Italian air that rippled through the quiet room with mournful sweetness.

Ruth lay entranced, and never took her eyes from Emmeline's face. Unconsciously she had expected the girl's voice to be of the same order as the scribbled romances; affected, and filled with false sentiment.

But it was not. The soft clear tones had something of a violin's compelling melody. Ruth had no technical knowledge of range of tone, and throatiness, and other musical terms. Her talents had led her to other knowledge. But she succumbed to the liquid notes that went down to the very depths of her heart, and seemed to lift her out of prosaic everyday life.

The last notes quivered softly away into silence. "Non mi la sciar!"

There was silence for a moment. The spell of the sad aria stilled Ruth. She could not speak for a swelling in her throat. Emmeline's wistful eyes were filled with hopeless longing for her frustrated hopes.

And then, with a sudden impetuous bound, Ruth was out of bed, and her arms were flung about Emmeline's neck.

"I never heard such a voice!" she cried.

Emmeline was not expecting the vehement embrace. Surprised, she could not keep the tears from filling her eyes. Ruth, seeing them, began to cry herself, and in another moment, both girls were in each other's arms, weeping with all their might.

Emmy was the first to recover. "Sillies!" she laughed, and wiped the tears off her cheeks with her nurse's cap. "Crying because of a silly song!"

"A beautiful song!" Ruth protested. "I never heard — "

"But, Ruth, you must promise never to tell what I have told you. The dream is over, and I have given it up. I don't want it discussed. And I will never sing again."

"Perhaps your father will relent."

"No. He is a man who is very firm in his ideas. And he thinks that I am in love with my own voice. He said that it made me romantic, and different from my little sister who is dead. He complains that I dream of grand opera while other girls are playing with tops and hoops."

"Can't you show him that you are just like other girls except for this voice?"

"No," sullenly. "I daresay I am stubborn — perhaps I get it from him. But when he stopped my music lessons, I ceased to take any further interest in anything. I won't be like other girls. If I can't sing, I won't do anything he likes."

CHAPTER XIII

EMMELINE'S FIRST LONG WALK

The one day in the sickroom drew Ruth and Emmeline very close together. When Emmeline relapsed into her languor that was half an affectation, Ruth understood and warmly defended her against the comments of the other girls. She did not need to with those belonging to the Camp Fire group. They had imbibed enough of the spirit of that organization to be above unkind gossip, except in thoughtless intervals, and then they quickly made amends. Besides, the six who shared the secrets of the "Savage Maidens" were really fond of the pretty girl whose habitual languor was so often relieved by startling spells of vivacity.

Ruth timidly tried to explain the Camp Fire movement to her. Its wholesome trend seemed just what was needed to counteract Emmeline's unhealthy indifference to life.

"Ruth, if you love me, talk about something

else," Emmy begged. "I — really, I can't get interested. I hate climbing hills, and I hate being useful and kind and affectionate. Why, gracious, suppose I join and that little cat, Jeannette, joined — "

"No danger," laughed Ruth. "Jeannette and Blanche Shirly gaze at our trim costumes and sensible shoes, when we start on our Saturday hikes, in perfect horror."

"Well, there's that perky, saucy Georgia Wilton. She's keen on athletics. And she and I are enemies from first sight. She mimicked me the other day in class room. I had been reading Marmion aloud. Little cat!" Emmy laughed ruefully at the recollection.

Ruth did not insist, but waited. Sometime Emmeline would join. She wouldn't spoil matters by too much insistence.

So she changed the subject.

"Georgia's a game little thing," she said reflectively. "The other day at basket ball, she made a splendid showing, if it had not been for her, we'd have been defeated, and the sophomores would be crowing themselves hoarse."

"I suppose," yawned Emmeline unkindly, "that black-eyed Georgia sneaked up behind a soph that wasn't looking, pulled the ball from under her arms, and scooted to the basket."

"Nothing of the sort," declared Ruth. "Georgia got the ball away from a tall red-haired sophomore who fought like a tiger, and she had it all poised, ready to shoot it into the basket and cover herself and our team with glory, but the sophs' left guard threw up her arms. There was a chance for Georgia to shoot the ball past her. But it was only a chance. Some girls would have taken it. But Georgia showed her gameness. She *didn't.*"

"Goodness! I should think the only way to show gameness would be to take a chance!" Emmy was aghast. She had watched the girls practice until she had a smattering knowledge of the game.

"I'll tell you," Ruth said. "Jane was right guard. Georgia saw that she ran a chance of failing if she tried to dodge the sophomore guard, and shoot the ball to the basket by her own efforts. So she passed it to Jane, who ducked under the guard and hurled it in the air before the sophomores knew what was happening. Of course Jane

got the credit of giving the game to our team and Georgia missed a chance at applause. And that's what I call gameness — to put one's own glory aside for the sake of the team."

"H-m!" said Emmy thoughtfully. "I really didn't know that Georgia was that kind."

Ruth did not harp on the little story. She noted with secret gladness that it had made Emmeline thoughtful. Little by little, she was changing. The others did not notice it. They had not Ruth's keen eyes and greater opportunity for observation. Anne remarked one evening that Emmeline was getting awfully fond of Ruth.

"How queer!" Frances had laughed. "Ruth is such an unlikable girl. Are you sure, Anne?" with exaggerated anxiety.

Anne threw a French dictionary at Frances' head.

Instead of lounging in her room, reading and scribbling, Emmeline took to strolling over the campus with Ruth in the late afternoon when recitations and gymnasium work were over. Sometimes they left the campus and crossed the valley to the opposite hill. Sometimes they strolled as far as Hillside.

As the autumn came on, and the air grew crisp and full of tangy sweetness, Emmeline lost her pale languid look. A flash of color appeared in her cheeks. As for Ruth and the other Camp Fire Girls, they simply gloated over the glorious fresh air. They filled their rooms with red and yellow maple leaves, pine cones, artistic brambly sprays, and even queer little rocks that looked as though they might have a meaning and a history.

Jane cantered over the surrounding roads twice a week. Occasionally Emmeline got a horse at the village livery stable and accompanied her.

Anne plugged away at her beloved music. She practiced diligently, and went about usually with a rapt ecstatic expression that told of inward melody. Ruth could not help comparing her with Emmeline. Each had the divine gift, and they used it in such different ways. Anne made of hers a blessing to herself and all around her. Emmeline had stirred strife and unhappiness with hers.

One afternoon Emmeline sprang up from the couch, and tossed a magazine that she was reading, to the floor.

"Let's take a walk."

Ruth readily put away her pencil and paper. She was delving into the next day's Ancient History, and her head already ached from a multiplicity of dates. She looked amazed when Emmy kicked off the high-heeled slippers that she always wore, even when strolling as far as the shops in Hillside, and asked Ruth to loan her a pair of low-heeled boots.

"I'd like to see the spring," Emmeline vouchsafed. "I've been reading a romance about two lovers who plighted their troth by a celebrated spring in Germany. There were hundreds of guests sitting around. It's a splendid story." She had handed the magazine to Ruth, but she remembered, and again tossed it aside. She said regretfully. "But you don't read French."

"No," said Ruth cheerfully. "By this time year after next I hope to be able to disentangle a few French verbs without the aid of a lexicon and Mlle. Vauvert. She nearly wept in the classroom yesterday over my horrible pronunciation."

Ruth paused in the corridor. "Shall we ask any of the others? Anne is practicing, I know, and Betty is knee-deep in a thesis. But I believe Jane and Sarah —"

"No," decided Emmeline. "Just we two. I have never seen a natural spring —"

"Emmeline!"

"And never cared to see one until you told me about this one. Is it very far?"

"Depends," judiciously, "on what you call far."

They sauntered on. The air was warm for late October; even dusty.

Ruth was wearing her Camp Fire costume. Emmeline's skirt, though short and trim, was of softer serge. It caught easily on the sharp twigs and thorns as the path narrowed. She looked a bit longingly at Ruth's tougher dress that was impervious to outjutting points.

"My! I didn't know that it was so far," she at last exclaimed. "I'm tired — and I don't believe I'm so fond of a spring as I thought."

But just then they came to the last clump of dwarf oak. As they rounded it, Emmy exclaimed in admiration at the cabin. It was more picturesque than at Ruth's first visit. The climbing vines were red and gold and orange. The trees beyond were a gorgeous mass of foliage. The

ground was littered with gay leaves in the midst of which the spring sparkled like quicksilver.

Emmeline forgot her fatigue when old Jonathan came out, and Ruth had him tell again the legend of the robbers.

In the midst of his story, there was a hubbub of gay voices from the other side of the hill. Ruth started up eagerly and smiled with gay recognition as a group of Professor Leonard's boys came into view.

Lafe Browning and Howard Pelton advanced delightedly, and Ruth introduced them to Emmeline, who bowed with languid indifference. Arthur Murray and Jasper Whitney were close behind.

Ruth chattered gayly; her ready friendliness made it easy for her to talk to any boy who was near her brother's age, and the boys responded in like strain.

But Emmy looked at them patronizingly. "Youngsters," she was mentally saying, and they soon realized her attitude.

"Awfully glad you escaped pneumonia," Howard said. Under Emmeline's cool eyes, he was red-faced.

"She won't bite," said Ruth merrily. "I assure you the young lady is not a cannibal."

At that, the boys roared with glee, and Emmeline had to smile.

They chatted for a while. Lafe broached the idea of a joint picnic. But Ruth did not say much. Miss Belaire might not like it.

When the boys had gone on, Emmeline declared that she wanted to visit the cave. Jonathan's legend had fired her with enthusiasm.

"It is late," Ruth demurred. "See, the sun is getting low."

"We can hurry."

"No, we can't! That path," laughingly, "does not approve of speed. But we'll come again — "

"I'd rather *now,*" Emmeline pouted.

But Ruth had learned from the former disastrous trip to be prudent. And moreover she was careful not to dampen Emmeline's enthusiasm by a long tiresome trip. For by the time they reached the cave, Emmeline would be tired and disgusted with long walks.

"You said you were tired," Ruth reminded her.

Finally Emmeline gave in, and they sauntered back to school.

CHAPTER XIV

A REVENGE TRIP

One evening the seven girls were gathered in Ruth's room, as usual. For they liked to be together, and it was seldom that the languid Emmeline cared to go to the other rooms. So they had fallen into the habit of meeting there, unless lessons were too clamorous for attention.

"Girls," sighed Jane, "do you realize that it is nearly winter. Already the red and gold leaves are turning brown. And pretty soon the Camp Fire hikes will be chilly affairs."

"We ought to have another picnic," said Ruth, with a side glance at Emmy who was stretched lazily on the couch, "before it is too cold to eat our lunch in the cave."

"We surely ought to!" cried Betty. "A revenge trip!"

Sarah whirled up from the rocking chair in which she and Jane were crowded. Her impet-

uous movement sent the chair over and Jane landed on the floor. When they helped her up, Sarah cried:

"Betty, you've struck the right idea! We'll get revenge out of that old cave — or I'll know why. If Saturday is a nice day — "

"It's settled," said Ruth. "Let's plan the dinner."

Saturday was a glorious day; the crisp kind that sets one's blood tingling. Two other girls, Ella Windsor and Maude Warren, with whom Ruth had become intimate in basket-ball practice, came to her as she left the breakfast room, and asked to join the Camp Fire group. So they were taken along. And of course Emmeline accompanied them as guest. But Miss Drexal didn't go this time. She was busy, so she told them to be careful, and then waved them a gay good-bye from the piazza.

They swung over the campus to the path leading to the cabin, a gay laughing band. Ruth and Sarah were the best walkers, and they led. This time every girl was greedily observing trees, rocks, anything the knowledge of which would earn a

bead. In the previous weeks Jane had worked hard. She had learned to darn — which she detested — and stencil. She was counting on a bracelet by Christmas.

They paused long enough to show the spring to the new girls, then took the hill with a rush. It was easier this time. Betty had sensible shoes.

"There's where I fell down!" Ruth told them at one steep spot. "My, but clay does taste awful! Cold wet clay!"

"Ruth, you were a sight!" vowed Jane. "I'll wager those boys roared — "

"I don't think so," Anne put in. "They didn't seem that kind. They were nice — "

"Listen to Anne!" cried Emmy, resting a moment with an arm around a convenient sapling. "Anne the bashful!"

Anne blushed. "You know I don't mean anything, Emmeline! And you needn't — "

"Put you in a story?" Emmy teased her. "But I will. Let me see — was it the freckled one?"

"No," said Frances, "that was Howard Pelton, and he helped me down. A big black-haired chap

— Arthur Murray, I believe — took charge of Anne."

Anne ran on and joined Ruth to escape the chaff. By that time, they had reached the cave and put down their baskets. The two new girls under Jane's direction were allowed to gather the firewood in order that they might be initiated as soon as possible into the Camp Fire group.

They soon came back with great armloads of dry fagots which they piled on the smooth level spot just in front of the cave.

Sarah and Anne arranged the fagots, and then all except Betty and Emmy seated themselves in a circle around the wood. Ruth, as torchbearer, stepped forward and lighted the fire. Then, very softly, all chanted the ode to "Fire."

The roll call and record of honors won was omitted; that could be attended to in a meeting in the dormitory. So the two new girls were admitted as members, and then the picnic was in full force.

"I wish we'd brought more eatables," Ruth whispered to Anne. "I didn't plan for Ella and Maude."

"We'll have plenty," said Emmeline who was near enough to overhear. She smiled as she spoke.

"I don't know," worriedly. "This crisp air simply makes a person ravenous. I could eat almost that entire pile of sandwiches myself! And old Mandy didn't have much bread. She miscalculated, and didn't bake soon enough. It was too late to send in to the village."

"Oh, Ruth, why do you fret so?" Emmeline returned carelessly. "I assure you we'll have plenty — didn't you know I had the gift of prophecy?"

"We didn't bring any water!" cried Sarah. "Come — who'll help carry up a pail?"

"Two pails," said Frances. "We must make coffee, and then wash the knives and spoons."

"I think it's worth a bead to carry a pail of water up this hill. Isn't it, Ruth?" Jane demanded.

"You'll have to ask Miss Drexal," Ruth laughed. "But as guardian pro-tem, I'll say a good word for you."

Jane snatched a pail and rushed down, followed by Sarah. A minute later there was a crash in the

dry shrubbery below, two-ear-splitting shrieks, and then two peals of laughter.

Ruth dropped the jar of jam she was opening. Even Emmeline was startled. All rushed around the bend and looked down at Jane and Sarah who had lost their footing and gone sprawling into a yellow-leaved thicket.

"No harm done!" Jane called up merrily as she scrambled up and rescued the pail which had sailed farther down. "Come on, Sarah, and be careful," sternly, "you don't drop that pail again. Any dent in Jonathan's property, and you don't get a bead."

When they returned the cloth was spread over a spot of long yellow grass that the winds had whipped into flatness. The paper napkins were arranged with the knives and forks, and the cake, jam and cookies set out. Presently the coffee pot was sending out fragrant steam.

"Oh," cried Ruth, "we didn't bring any cream!" Her tone was dismayed. Ruth's one weakness was yellow coffee. Frances, who shared the craving, looked up dolefully.

"What a shame! But never mind. Shut your eyes and maybe it won't taste so bad."

Emmeline rose and walked around the bend.

"Where are you going, Emmy?" Betty demanded curiously. "Not back to the school?"

"What an idea" laughed Emmy. "No — I just want to look down at the valley. The view is exquisite from this point."

There was a slightly uneasy expression on her face. Ruth fancied she was tired of the expedition. But the coffee was ready to pour, so she had no time to worry. She was passing the sandwiches to the two newest members of the Camp Fire group when crackling steps were heard on the dry leaves of the path, and then old Jonathan appeared before them.

He carried a big basket covered with a white napkin, and a bright blue pitcher. His eyes were twinkling under the shaggy gray brows. The girls stared at him wonderingly.

"Thought mebbe you'd underestimated your appetites," he chuckled as he set basket and pitcher down. "So I brought up a few bites."

Without waiting for their thanks, he sauntered, still chuckling, down the hill. A chorus of wondering exclamations followed him.

"Well, what do you think of that?" cried Sarah. "Isn't he an old dear?"

"Now, Ruth," cried Anne gayly, "you can eat all you want!"

For Ruth had wonderingly lifted the cloth and taken out an immense covered dish. Taking off its cover, she discovered the still hot sections of three fried chickens.

"Oh, what a perfectly delicious smell!" gurgled Jane, dancing up and down. "And we would have been content with mere cold tongue and ham!"

Another cloth covered a mammoth old-fashioned jelly cake.

"Do I love jelly cake!" sighed Frances. "I've been wanting some since the day I left home. My mother bakes the loveliest — just like that — Oh, hurry, Ruth! I can't wait another second to eat!"

Ruth drew out a jar of spicy pickles and two glasses of pale amber jelly. The pitcher was full of cream. Her wits had been working. She remembered Emmy's abstracted manner when they had been about to eat; her inexplicable stroll around the bend. Of course, she was afraid he wouldn't get there in time. And Jonathan had

flashed Emmeline a twinkling side glance as he turned away.

Ruth sprang up and faced the girls. "The Camp Fire Girls," she said seriously, "appreciate any attention. But for food tendered us at just the proper time, we have a feeling that is far more than appreciation. It's just downright love, and any girl we love has *got* to belong to us!" She looked at Emmeline, and the girls understood.

"Emmeline Cerrito!" they shouted. "You're the dearest girl — "

But Ruth waved them to silence until she had finished her speech.

"But we can't love any girl the way we'd like to, unless she loves us, too. And we know any one who loves us, ought to belong to us. We're sure that Emmy Cerrito loves us in her heart, and so she's got to join us. Don't you want to, Emmy?"

Ruth's voice was pleading, and she flung an arm around Emmy's neck in a tight hug.

But Emmeline was disconcerted by the speech. A year older than Ruth, and two or three years older than the others, she had always considered

herself more of a young lady. In fact, they had sometimes chafed under her patronizing air when they were frolicking. Now she flushed. A decided little frown appeared on her pretty face. She plainly resented Ruth's little trap.

"Really, Ruth," she said, rather vexedly, "I had no idea my little surprise would create such a furore! But I wanted to repay you for your many kindnesses — all of you," with a charming smile at the other girls. "And I couldn't find any way. You Camp Firers are so horribly independent and active that one has to scheme to do anything for you!"

"Any girl who thought of such a surprise ought to be a Camp Fire Girl," Anne murmured, coming to Ruth's aid.

"Oh, I don't — think — I care to," Emmy protested.

"Yes, you do," Ruth cried. "And here's Betty, too. Don't blush so furiously, Betty, I won't keep still. You're just holding out against us because you're stubborn. Now, girls, we're not going to eat a bite of that chicken unless the girl who gave it becomes a Camp Fire Girl, and if she joins,

we're not going to let another girl here have even a bite of jelly cake unless she says she too wants to be a wood-gatherer."

"One! Two! Three!" cried Jane, "Ready! Go!"

With a rush they went, a laughing, hugging body that took Emmeline and Betty into a tangle of arms. "Will you join?" Jane shrieked in Betty's ear.

"My goodness! Yes!" squealed Betty, "Let me go — you're choking me, Jane Pellew!"

Emmeline struggled, then gave way laughingly.

"All in favor of admitting Elizabeth Wyndham and Emmeline Cerrito to the Cave Dwellers Camp Fire Group say aye!" Ruth called, her voice carrying clearly above all the din.

"Aye! *Aye!*" shouted Jane and Sarah in shrill soprano. "Aye!" piped Anne and Frances.

"You're elected!" Ruth announced. "Betty, pass the chicken, and don't let Anne take all the white meat."

"Ruth, you're mean," protested Anne. "I'm not a pig."

When they had finished eating, every chicken

bone was gnawed bare, and only a fleck of red jelly at the corner of Betty's mouth testified that there had been such an article as cake on the hillside that afternoon. Afterward they inspected the cave, and showed the new members the white bullet spots on the walls. Then they looked for nuts and managed to fill the basket and pails full of shaggy brown hazelnuts and a few big walnuts.

Emmeline threw aside all her dignity, and frolicked with no remembrance of her age. Betty raced through the wild brush until her disheveled hair and flushed face were far from prim. And she calmly won two blue beads for her lore in trees and weeds.

"Where did you learn how to recognize them?" Jane demanded enviously. "Fifteen trees all in a breath — and I've been weeks learning to tell twelve!"

"You must remember I live in northern New York," Betty explained. "So I know every tree of this part of the country."

"Oh, girls, we must start home," Ruth cried as the sun dropped in red glory over the hilltop. "You know Miss Belaire has announced that we

must be immaculate for dinner. And every Saturday evening dinner is to be as formal as though we were entertaining in our homes, so we may learn how to do the right thing —''

''At the right time and in the right place!'' Jane finished, rather mockingly. ''And that's what my particular father sent me here to learn. Come along. We'll take the downward trip with a whoop, and the rest of the day we'll behave.''

CHAPTER XV

AN EXPERIENCE MEETING

Somehow a brilliant account of that afternoon went through the school. Several girls audibly regretted that they had not joined the Camp Fire movement, and so shared in the good time. In the freshman class Emmeline held a unique position. Ruth was the recognized leader but Emmeline's expensive clothes and perfect self-possession brought her the admiration of a certain element. Jeannette and Blanche Shirly cultivated her as much as she would allow, and swallowed the sharp speeches she threw them. For Emmeline had a knack of using sharp witty sentences.

So, when they learned that Emmeline had joined, they came for more information concerning the movement. But Emmy, though a member, had not yet absorbed the genuine spirit of love that would have enabled her to welcome girls for whom she did not care.

"Jeannette," she said earnestly, "I wouldn't go through that initiation again for the world. I can't describe it!"

"O-o-oh!" shrilled Jeannette and her round eyes popped. "Tell me about it!"

"I can't," returned Emmy mysteriously. "I'm under oath. But — would you believe that we had to eat — a *dead* animal!"

"*What!*"

Miss Drexal from the corridor below looked up reprovingly at the nook on the stairway where the three girls stood. Jeannette's scream of horror had floated down and drawn the attention of the entire senior class as they paced from chapel.

"That's exactly what we had to do!" Emmeline told her gravely. "Really, when I had finished what they gave me, I — I simply couldn't have got another bite into my mouth!"

"I never heard of anything so awful!" Blanche declared. "Who — *who* proposed it?"

"Why, you know Ruth Garnier is high commanding officer." Then Emmeline, with a wicked gleam in her eyes, said confidentially, "She is awfully anxious for you two to join. But don't let

her know that I've given anything away. I didn't want to join," she added dejectedly. "They simply forced me. And now I've gone and promised to do a lot of things I don't want to."

"Well!" Blanche and Jeannette declared with a toss of their elaborate coiffures, "we don't care to join — and we won't!"

Emmy laughed softly as they scurried, chattering excitedly, down the stairs to the history recitation room.

The next meeting of the Camp Fire Girls was held Friday evening in the room of Anne, Jane and Betty. Miss Belaire had announced that the entire freshman class must meet Saturday afternoon in the chapel and form the preliminary plans for the entertainment the class gave every year on the last evening of the first term.

The girls did not mind losing the afternoon as much as they would if the weather had continued fair. But the warm sunshine had given way to a cold sleet that made outdoors impossible even for the most intrepid.

There were several new applicants for membership: Nelly Andrews was one, a little flaxen-

haired girl from Iowa who blushed every time she spoke to any one, but who could work instantly every problem ever found in a musty geometry. Betty was her lifelong friend as soon as she nonchalantly found the value of a mysterious angle that had brought the tears to Betty's eyes more than once.

Since it was not possible to have a fire in the room, the ceremony was begun by means of three candles arranged on a hassock, and then Ruth called all to gather around it. When they had repeated the ode, Jane, who was secretary, brought forth the official roll.

It was an ornate affair. The cover was of rich green leather and the leaves were fastened with leather thongs, making it a simple matter to add more as the annals increased. Jane had considerable skill in sketching, so a shadowy charcoal portrait of each member, as soon as she joined, adorned one of the back pages.

The frontispiece was a watercolor by Anne; a heap of blazing fagots against a background of gorgeous autumn foliage, and a hint of pink and gold sunset beyond. On the cover, Frances had

brought her pyrographic skill into play and burned a dim brown cave opening half way up a pine-covered hill. This was the totem or symbol selected by the Hillside Camp Fire Group. On the pages following the title leaf came the individual record of honors won.

"Let's have an experience meeting to-night," Ruth suggested this Friday evening.

"You will have to explain." said Jane. "What sort of experiences? Classroom, social, tribulations or what?"

"The chief thing each one has done since last meeting," Ruth explained. "Not necessarily connected with the Camp Fire desires, but whatever has been the most important incident of the week to each girl."

They looked at each other doubtfully and each waited for another to begin.

"Jane can call the roll," Ruth said. "After giving her own experience."

"Um-m-m," said Jane thoughtfully. "That's not fair. I'd like more time to think. I got zero in a chemistry test — but, pouf! I don't think that's so important. I'm just taking one term of

it for fun. The horse I got at the Hillside livery went lame — I cried over that swollen ankle. Still that's not so important. Oh, yes! My finicky father joyously wrote me Tuesday that Miss Belaire had informed him on five sheets of gray linen paper that his daughter was rapidly learning how to enter a drawing-room and subside gracefully onto a frail spindle-legged chair, without knocking said chair over. That in time I would be — ah! — really 'distingue.' Now, Anne — 'fess up! Oh, I know Ruth's name, like Ben Adhem's in the old poem, heads all the rest, but I'm going to leave our guardian to the last. Her 'experience' is sure to throw all others in the shade and I don't want to discourage you, Anne!"

Anne's delicate face grew softly pink. "It sounds rather silly, but I really can't think of anything else so important. Linda, the little German girl in the village who launders my lace waists, didn't get them finished this week. I needed one for the musical Wednesday evening so I ran down that afternoon. And the poor thing was simply frightened to death! The waist with the Irish lace yoke had stuck to the bottom of the

washboiler and scorched. She didn't have the money to pay for it and she didn't know what to do. The tears just rolled down her face — ''

''And you told her it didn't matter a bit, and paid her double to console her?'' mockingly asked Emmy.

''It was an old waist,'' Anne explained, blushing. ''Really, it was nearly worn out. And I never liked it very well — ''

''Anne, you are the softest, silliest, nicest girl in this Camp Fire Group,'' cried Betty.

''Before we cry over Linda, let's hear from you, Sarah,'' Anne interrupted briskly in order to restore gayety.

''Miss Drexal informed me that chapel exercises began at nine o'clock instead of nine three,'' said Sarah. ''She seemed rather annoyed because she had to mention it. And she wouldn't listen when I tried to tell her that our dormitory is the farthest one from chapel and that a cultured young lady never gallops through corridors.''

''Sarah!'' cried an incredulous chorus. ''You never talked that way to Miss Drexal?''

''No,'' sighed Sarah. ''I merely thought of saying it.''

"Frances!" called Jane peremptorily. "That wasn't much of an experience, Sarah Manners," in a scornful aside.

"Mine isn't much bigger," said Frances. "I spent three long evenings — till the lights went out at ten, didn't I, Sarah? — writing a lucid and brilliant essay on the 'Influence of Popular Magazines upon Our Literature.' This morning I was in an awful rush. Some buttons came off my gown, and after Miss Belaire's stunning lecture on personal neatness, I didn't dare wear it. And changing made me late. I grabbed some pages of written stuff, clamped them together after reading only the top one, and handed in — eight pages of stuff describing our faculty that I had scribbled one night for fun and then forgotten. Pictures of them too, oh, elegant pictures! I lengthened every nose, broadened every chin, squinted their eyes, and stuck in little dabs of impertinent poetry. Maybe," gloomily, "I'll be expelled."

"Lovely!" said Jane heartily. "Now, *that's* what I call experience. Maude Warren!"

Maude was not yet fully at ease in the crowd, although the day on the hill had gone far in estab-

lishing her and Ella Windsor in the charming intimacy. Rather self-consciously she reported that she had received word early in the week that her mother was getting well after a severe siege of pneumonia. "And I haven't been able to think of anything else," she ended lamely.

"Me?" said Ella Windsor ungrammatically. She was a slender wiry girl with sharp features and thin colorless hair. "Monday I tried some cold cream that a girl home sent me. She said it was fine. Would take my freckles off. It did. And the skin too. It still hurts," tenderly touching some red blotches on her cheeks. "Tuesday I dropped a big carton of soft oozy peanut butter over the pale green matting rug at the head of the main stairway. I got it at the delicatessen shop in town. I like buns and peanut butter before I go to bed — "

"So do I!" cried seven of those present. "Got any left?"

"No," drearily. "But there's a lot in the rug yet. Tuesday, you know, some friends of Miss Belaire's, a senator from some place and his wife and daughters, came to call upon her. They

walked down the hall just as I spilled the butter. Girls, have you ever seen Miss Belaire when she is really angry?"

"Two sad affairs," Jane commented genially. "The next —"

"Wait," Ella commanded. "Wednesday, on Main street, I tripped and fell flat in front of all Professor Leonard's boys. Five of 'em helped me from the pavement — and never smiled. Gentlemen — that's what they are. I shall send every one a postcard at Christmas. Thursday evening I wore my new white serge frock to dinner, and managed to pour my bowl of soup in my lap. Today I lost a pearl ring — "

"Ella," said Jane firmly, "you are deserving of sympathy, but we would like to hear from the others, and time is passing. I advise you to see the seventh daughter of the seventh daughter of some witch, and get a rabbit's foot found in a graveyard at midnight. You need it. Emmeline!"

Emmeline yawned. "Can't think of a thing," she declared. "Except — that my mother sent me a white crepe de chine gown that is the loveliest

thing I ever saw. And I wish," dolefully, "I had some place to wear it."

Some of the gayety seemed to evaporate. Several pair of wistful eyes turned to Emmeline. "Is it made panier?" Betty wanted to know.

"I love crepe de chine," said Anne softly. "It's so dainty — "

"I'd love to see you in it!" Sarah cried. "You're just the style for long clingy white effects — "

"Ladies!" snapped Jane. "There is a roll call of experiences in progress. Styles and clingy dresses are out of order. Betty Wyndham, speak up. It's your turn."

"I worked five problems in geometry all by myself!" boasted Betty.

"Grand! Who helped you?" asked Jane.

"Oh, well, Ruth just gave me a hint — "

She blushed at the roar of laughter that greeted her naive admission. "I don't care. It was nearly all by myself," she insisted.

Nelly Andrews and the other two applicants modestly told of credits earned in the recitation room. They were ashamed that they had nothing more thrilling to offer.

"Never mind," said Jane kindly. "Now you're part of the Camp Fire Order anything is liable to happen to you. Now, Ruth, it's your turn. And if you don't cap every story told, we'll toss you in a blanket!"

"The most important event of the week," Ruth began laughingly, "is the addition to the Camp Fire — "

"Now that isn't fair," Jane and Sarah both cried. "These new members are all right, and we're glad you coaxed 'em in, but don't use them as an experience."

"I've not been late at chapel — "

"You're never late at anything," Jane sniffed scornfully. "Tell something bigger."

"Miss Belaire said — "

"That you're a model scholar and perfect lady, and a lovely girl; we all know that. She says it every day," Betty cried.

Ruth rarely blushed. But at this she did. "No such thing," she cried. "She said the Camp Fire movement was just the thing to keep young girls interested in sane healthy topics."

"But — your experience," Jane interposed im-

patiently. "Ruth, you've got to tell something more personal."

"Very well," yielded Ruth. "I merely wanted to get you aroused. My dear father and thoughtful mother decided that their only daughter was probably homesick and lonesome and needed cheering up. So they sent me a ten pound box of chocolate creams, marshmallows, preserved pine apple, macaroons, and also a fruit cake that is the quintessence of spicy fruity delight. Emmeline, I pushed it under your chair. Eat fast, girls. Only twenty minutes till ten. Load up so you can eat after you're in bed."

"Didn't I tell you that Ruth's experience would make us forget all others?" Jane mumbled through a mouthful of fondant.

CHAPTER XVI

A RACE WITH THE SOPHOMORES

When Miss Belaire, gracious as usual in gray silk, stepped to the front of the chapel Saturday afternoon and told the assembled freshman class that the annual entertainment was always left entirely in their hands, and that they could select the form it would take, make out the entire program, and so forth, a very frightened band looked up at her. There was a general quaking at the responsibility.

And then with one accord, they turned relievedly to Ruth. Not only the Camp Fire Group — by this time no small number — relied upon her, but every girl in the class went to Ruth for help in a crisis. So far she had failed no one.

"You'll think of something, won't you, Ruth?" Jane said composedly, as though that settled the matter.

"Just pick out what you want us all to do, and we'll do it," promised Sarah.

"Make out a program, Ruth," said Betty. "Anything you like," generously. "It'll be sure to suit. Won't it, Miss Belaire?"

"I don't like to take all the responsibility," Ruth demurred slowly.

"No one else has sense enough," said Georgia Wilton sharply. "And there'd be simply a lot of time wasted in arguing if several were appointed."

"But I hope," Blanche Shirly whispered as they left the chapel, "that it won't be one of those horrid Camp Fire affairs."

Later Emmeline laughingly reported the whisper. Ruth had naturally thought of the Camp Fire members as the chief aids in an entertainment. Now she felt guilty and troubled. So she promptly went to Blanche and asked her assistance in planning. Blanche threw up two white gorgeously ringed hands in consternation.

"Good gracious, Ruth Garnier, it's all I can do to get a smattering of my lessons so the teachers won't write to papa, and look after my clothes. And I never helped get up a program. I would be only a bother to you. Mercy!" And Blanche shivered at the mere thought.

Ruth was relieved. Already a brilliant idea had occurred to her and she wanted the luxury of working it out unhampered. She was jubilant over the material at hand. There was Betty's recitative powers, Anne's gift of melody, Frances' knack at stringing witty rhymes, and there was other talent besides that of the Camp Fire girls. Georgia Wilton was a clever little thing. Blanche Shirly, despite her affectations, could sing sweetly. There would be no necessity to let the Camp Fire girls take all the honors, although they would of course be most prominent if that organization had never been heard of, for they were the leaders of the class anyway.

Then Ruth frowned thoughtfully. It would never do to leave Emmy out. She must think of something that would bring her into closer connection with the whole class, for she was still troubled over the pretty French girl.

True, Emmeline was not so indifferent and supercilious as when she came. She had lost many of her former selfish ways. To the Camp Fire Girls at least, she was tender and affectionate. And even to pouting Jeannette, whom she could not bear, she was more amiable.

Although she still wrote, the nature of her stories had changed. The last one had been a wholesome little tale about old Jonathan rescuing some real girls from a real danger. She had read it to the Camp Fire Group at one of their meetings and all had exclaimed in glee over the realistic description of the quaint old man and his kindly old wife. Ruth told her quite seriously that she had great talent.

"This kind is just as easy to write as the others," Emmy acknowledged. "I think it is a better story. At least," she flushed a bit, "I'm not ashamed to read it aloud to a crowd, and the others," with a little laugh, "I was. They sounded — so mushy."

But her voice held first place in her heart. She still dreamed over it, and fell into long moody spells that worried Ruth. She would lounge all afternoon in a chair with her face propped in her hands, and muse in somber silence. Her lessons were too light to occupy her, and neither Ruth nor Jane could induce her to take other branches.

Whenever a letter from Nicaragua in her father's handwriting came, a proud bitter look

would flash over Emmy's face. She would glance over the few pages, then toss it contemptuously into the waste basket. Her mother's she put carefully away.

And she took pains to let Ruth know that her replies were brief and merely stereotyped reports of her life.

Ruth remonstrated. She herself could hardly wait for the day her own father's long affectionate letters came, and she couldn't bear the different state of affairs in which Emmy existed.

"Why don't you write a nice long letter — "

"Not for a million dollars," Emmy retorted sullenly. "He hasn't treated me fairly. I can write as cold letters as he can."

Ruth spent many anxious minutes worrying over the estrangement. When Emmy one morning read a letter, and then announced in a hard voice that she was coming back to the school the next term, because she felt more at home there with the girls than in her father's house, Ruth resolved more firmly to give her a part in the entertainment that would make the entire class admire her.

Then the next term Emmeline would be so much a part of the gay school life that her bitterness would melt. She could not be on good terms with all the world and hold out against her father. Ruth had a fairly shrewd knowledge of human nature.

And she felt that if Emmeline's father knew of the change that had already taken place in his daughter's nature, he would relent and the estrangement would be over. If he knew — Ruth's cheeks flared with red. She looked about furtively. As it happened, she was alone in the room. Emmeline was downstairs in the library.

Then Ruth did something entirely foreign to her code of ethics, but she felt the end justified the means. She fished a crumpled letter from the waste basket and copied the address of Emmy's father.

She had scarcely tucked the scrap of paper away in her desk when Jane bounced into the room bearing a long flat narrow package. Anne, Betty and Sarah followed excitedly.

"You'll never guess!" she cried. "But you may try three times."

"They're too long for tennis rackets," Ruth said, puzzled.

"Tennis rackets! Now that would be a bright thing to buy when the biggest snowstorm ever heard of is due to hit us Sunday!"

"She won't tell us," complained Betty. "And we've been guessing for an hour!"

"They're something Camp Fire Girls are supposed to know how to use," Anne said. "But I've named every article in the dictionary from crutches to baseball bats."

"That looks like a baseball bat!" Jane cried scornfully, waving it.

"I know," said Ruth calmly. "I've been in Canada, Jane, where they're as common as mittens."

"Oh, tell us," Sarah begged. "Jane is the most impish, unkind person in the whole Camp Fire tribe. Some day she'll want to know something that I know."

"They're snowshoes," Ruth declared. "Where did you get them, and how much did they cost? And are there any more? I'm going to the village this minute and get a pair."

Gayly Jane unwrapped the wood-bound webs, and then fastened the thongs of the rackets over her walking shoes. One gay pirouetting step and Jane fell headlong. Betty, springing out of the way, tripped over the curving narrow wood and fell with her.

Abashed, Jane struggled up, and ruefully unfastened the thongs.

Ruth was rapidly putting on her hat and coat. She looked at her watch and decided that they could make the trip to the village before dinner if they hurried.

"We'll hurry," said Sarah. "Because if those sophomores get a hint that we want them, they'll rush down and buy every pair in town."

Ruth flew to find Emmeline and the others while Anne, Betty and Sarah got their wraps. But Emmeline, browsing in Ancient Rome, declined. "Heavens! No! Go out in the snow! Why my nose would freeze, and I'd have pneumonia. Still, Ruth, you may buy me a pair. They'll look nice on the wall of our room; I can tack small snapshots along the edges, and fill in the webbing with photographs."

As Ruth and Nelly Andrews waited in the lower hall for the others, two of the sophomores came by in a tremendous hurry. They did not see the two freshmen on the other side of the big bulletin board.

"I saw one of those energetic freshmen coming from town with a pair of snowshoes," one said. She was the curly-haired girl who had teased them most when they got off the train that first day. "I'll wager she'll incite all the others, and they'll make a bee-line for the shop. Wouldn't it be a great joke to get there ahead of them and buy every pair? Come, most of the girls are in the gymnasium. Let's call all of them, rush down, and forestall the freshies."

"Oh — will you?" mocked Ruth. "Nelly, you run down the left corridor and tell every girl to hustle — hustle — hustle. And I'll take the right. Oh, here they come. Girls!" she called piercingly. "Hurry, oh, *hurry!*"

She danced with impatience as Betty delayed to pin her veil. Nelly ran up and whispered the threatened danger. And then they came downstairs with a slam and bounce that brought a repri-

mand from Miss Belaire who heard them in her office. That delayed them three minutes.

As they rushed out on the porch, they heard the sophomores come tearing down the stairs. And again Miss Belaire's displeased accents rang through the hall.

"She'll lecture them longer," cried Ruth, "because they're older than we are, so we'll have at least a five minute start. Now, for the love of snowshoes, run as you never ran before."

They ran pellmell across the snow-covered campus, laughing, screaming back triumphantly at the pursuing band of sophomores.

"Girls," warned Ruth, "keep quiet, or you'll be out of breath. We can laugh afterward."

Then they put their gay lips close together, bent their heads before the wind, and sprinted. A mile and a half at a dead run is a hard trip. And that day a cold nipping wind blew directly in their faces. Had not their Camp Fire hikes trained them they could not have held out. But even Betty had been hardened by the trips up the hill and through the rocky paths of the valley. After they left the campus and struck into the

roadway, they were able to follow the wagon tracks in the snow and make faster time.

Behind them the sophomores raced, and steadily the distance between them lessened. Then they struck Main Street and its clean pavements. Passers-by hastily got out of the way of the flying band and stood in the road to watch them.

Sarah, Frances and Ruth were the leaders. Sarah and Frances had hiked over Western prairies all their lives and were used to long jaunts and cold winds. Ruth was the best sprinter in the freshman class. But delicate Anne and Betty were nearly exhausted when they reached Main Street. The sophomores whirled past them, calling back a taunt.

They were at the heels of Ruth and Sarah when they reached the door of the shop. Ruth turned the knob, sprang in, Sarah and Frances pushed in behind her — and then Ruth pulled the door shut and held it. The foremost sophomore strained vainly at the knob.

"Buy all the snowshoes, Sarah," she ordered. "Hurry."

The little old lady who owned the shop came

bustling forward; her faded blue eyes twinkled. She was used to school scrimmages.

"How many pairs have you?" Sarah asked. "Twelve? Give them to me, please."

As Sarah took the great pile, the sophomores threw themselves in a body against the door. The knob yielded despite all the strength of Ruth and Frances. But they did not care. Sarah had bought the snowshoes, and they giggled triumphantly at the disappointed upper class girls.

Then, with victorious haughtiness, they distributed the long unwieldly shoes among the other freshmen who came, breathless and spent, into the shop.

CHAPTER XVII

AN INVITATION FROM THE BOYS

One Wednesday evening, after dinner, Miss Belaire came upstairs to Ruth's room. It was so unusual an occurrence for Miss Belaire to go to any girl's room that they knew something had happened or was about to happen. Ruth imagined that her call concerned the coming entertainment. While she hospitably pushed forward a big cushioned rocker, she hoped that Miss Belaire wouldn't insist upon hearing her plans that night. They were still in embryo, and Ruth wanted to perfect them before making them public.

Betty and Jane, who were digging a problem out together, looked frightened. What had they done? Anne was not frightened for herself, but she stole a sympathetic look at Emmeline. Rumor the past week had said that Miss Belaire didn't like Emmeline's lack of application to school work nor her expensive clothes, and that she considered

Miss Cerrito a bad example for the younger girls.

Sarah and Jane exchanged a glance of alarm. Both had been late at roll call that morning, and Miss Drexal had warned them that it must not happen again that term.

Miss Belaire smiled at the circle of faces, and held open a letter as she sank into the chair.

"I have a very unusual communication," she said. "And ordinarily I don't encourage gayeties outside the school. But I have a very pressing invitation from Professor Leonard and his boys. The young gentlemen would like to entertain the girls whom they helped down from the cave. They suggest an afternoon outdoors. They seem to imagine that you would like to be taught the use of snowshoes. Then supper at Professor Leonard's house. So if you care to go, Miss Drexal will be glad to accompany you. She enjoys being outdoors this bracing weather."

"How perfectly lovely!" cried Jane. "I was afraid I'd never learn how to use them."

Betty was silent. But a certain demure look in her eyes told that she was willing to go. Sarah and Frances clapped their hands. Anne appeared alarmed.

"We'll be very glad to go," Ruth accepted decorously. "And it is very kind of them to ask us."

"And Miss Cerrito is included," Miss Belaire added as she rose to leave. "I believe she met some of the boys at the spring one day with Ruth."

Saturday at two o'clock the girls set out. At first Emmy had not cared to go but Ruth persuaded her. This was not a difficult task, as she wasn't very keen on a long lonesome day in the dormitory. They had expected to walk across the valley to the school by themselves, but the boys were waiting on the campus, and every one wore snowshoes.

The girls were carrying theirs; all but Ruth who had some experience in Canada with them. But she was making awkward progress and she was very glad when Lafe Grinnell strode to her side and showed her how to make a smooth onward motion that did not cut the snowy surface.

Emmeline was introduced to those of her hosts whom she had not met, and then the fun began. Ella Griswold and Maude Warren had not been included in the invitation, but they generously

And then the fun began. The girls could not keep their footing on the unwieldly shoes, and shrieks of laughter could be heard across the campus.

pressed a pair of snowshoes on Miss Drexal who had none.

Though the campus was a smooth stretch of white, unmarked by ridges or rocks, the girls could not keep their footing on the unwieldly shoes. After Anne had tumbled five times face downward in the snow, and five times been righted by Arthur Murray, the big black-haired giant who had piloted her down from the cave, she forgot to be shy, and her shrieks of laughter could be heard across the campus.

"Say, Miss Garnier," called Howard Pelton, "does snow taste as good as clay?"

"Almost," sang Ruth merrily. "But — oh, where's my right foot?"

She had collided with Emmeline and the two went down. Emmy's languor was absolutely gone. Her face was crimson, and her hair would have fallen if she hadn't tied a veil over the close motor hood that she was wearing.

Billy Randolph had promptly paired off with Jane. A similarity in temperament drew them together. Both were impudent and breezy.

"You look as though you could handle a horse,"

Billy told her admiringly. "I've got the dandiest little mare — I'll lend her to you."

"Now, how could you tell?" Jane cried, immensely pleased with the compliment. "Do I really look like a horsewoman? What are the signs?"

"Oh, just the way you stick your elbows out," imitating her free and easy movement. "And the swinging way you walk. And the way you hold up your chin — I bet two of the boys that you were a dandy rider."

"You must be an awfully close observer," Jane said admiringly.

Just then Lafe Grinnell called back. "Billy's been feeling awfully bad because your horse went lame the other day, Miss Pellew. We were on the opposite hill, and tried to get across in time to help you. Was it a stone in his foot?"

"Yes," said Jane. Then she turned wrathfully to Billy. "Why, you've seen me riding. Every week, I daresay. Oh, my! what an acute observer!"

Billy blushed until his round face was as brilliantly red as the shock of hair that stuck out

from under his woolen cap. He had audacious green eyes. And now they twinkled until Jane, vexed as she was, had to laugh.

"Well, a fellow's got to say something — hasn't he? And I thought that was a clever speech!"

"Oh," cried Jane, looking ahead. "The lazy things!"

Jasper Whitney, the tall boy with glasses, had stooped and unfastened the thongs of Sarah's rackets. Then he calmly unfastened his own, and slung the four snowshoes over his shoulder. They strode on, talking animatedly.

"Can't talk," he called back when Jane sent a shrill taunt after them, "when you're tumbling down and picking yourself up all the time."

"His father owns a ranch out West," Billy said. "But he's not a bit strong for sports. Likes to poke around and read."

"That's the reason they want to talk," Jane said instantly. "Sarah's father owns a ranch in Nevada. I suppose they each feel as if they've met some one from home."

By then they had reached the creek, which was really almost a river at that point. It was frozen

into white crystal. The low bushes which bordered it were loaded with snow, and the twigs looked like white roses.

None of the girls were so expert with the webbed shoes as to risk crossing it. And the hill beyond was gnarly.

"I have no desire to slide down hill head over heels," Betty whispered to Emmeline. And even Ruth and Jane thought it too much of a risk. So all took their shoes off, and skimmed across.

"If the hill wasn't so bumpy, it would make a lovely toboggan slide," said Betty. "At home, we have a small hill whose side is as straight and smooth — "

"Do you know," said Emmeline, "I've always wanted to try that toboggan slide I've heard so much of. Over in France, we used to wonder what it was."

Billy grinned at all the boys in turn. A meaningless grin, Emmeline decided, and wondered what she had said that was so very funny.

"Ever see a toboggan slide, boys?" Howard Pelton demanded as they trudged up the hill.

"Before the winter is over, we'll make one," said Ruth pleasantly. She too had noticed the

significant grin, and wondered uneasily if the boys didn't like Emmeline. For Emmeline had not treated them nicely that day at the spring.

Presently they had reached the smooth gradual slope that led to the piazza of Professor Leonard's home. As the boys led them into a wide roadway that stretched to the steps, most of the girls were disappointed. They would rather have staid outdoors and frolicked.

But instead of going up the wide steps, Lafe marched on, past the house, and around a leafless row of lilac bushes that towered above their heads. And there, he drew back, and waved his hand proudly.

"Some slide — eh?"

The girls gasped. At that point, the hill showed a smooth straight path that led down and through the valley below. Before them was an immense toboggan that would seat twelve people, the exact number there, excepting Miss Drexal, who, however, laughingly declined to accompany them.

Lafe was steerer. Ruth was behind him. Emmeline was afraid, so she stayed with Miss Drexal until they had made several trips. Then the fas-

cination of the swift slide tempted her, and she snuggled in behind Ruth.

Billy Randolph was last.

"Tell you what," he confided as he tucked Jane on, "it was hard work planning this path. We worked for a week, and then we were afraid it was too dangerous. But we've never had an accident. Lafe's a splendid steerer. We're of-f-f!"

Jane shuddered as his shrieking whistle cut her ears. And then as they went down — down — down — with a velocity that took no account of fear or beating hearts or tight-gripping hands, her own ear-splitting shriek mingled with the others.

CHAPTER XVIII

DINNER AT PROFESSOR LEONARD'S HOUSE

At the end of the tenth trip they came up, laughing and glowing, to find that Miss Drexal had grown tired of waiting and gone inside. They were conscience-stricken. No one could remember how many trips they had made without seeing her. And then they discovered that it was very nearly dark. In their excitement they had not noticed that daylight was waning.

"How do you like it?" Billy called to Emmeline.

"It is simply divine!" she answered rapturously. "It's what I've dreamed of — and to think I've missed it all these years! Why, for tobogganing, I'd risk — chilblains!"

The boys laughed, well pleased, and then Lafe Grinnell led the way to the house. Miss Drexal was on the wide porch, peering at the path to see if they were coming. By then it was quite dark, so fast had the time flown.

Professor Leonard, who had very white hair and wrinkled face, and very young black eyes, greeted them with a quaint old-fashioned gallantry that charmed them. Ruth resolved to write to her father that night and have her young brother sent there. The atmosphere was just right to turn a harumscarum youngster into a gentleman.

"Hurry up and tuck your hair up, girls, and make yourselves tidy," advised Billy Randolph. "Otherwise I'll forget I'm your host and start to eat supper this very minute!"

"I knew you were a splendid eater," jibed Jane. "You have all the signs, hungry eyes, a voracious expression — "

Then she fled laughing upstairs with the others, while Billy shook his fist at her.

Supper was spread on a long table in the big hall that lay between the double parlors on one side and the libraries on the other. Opposite the entrance door was a great old-fashioned fireplace heaped high with pine logs that were blazing red. Above it were antlers, strings of wampum, some queer old daggers and an oil portrait of Lafayette in his uniform.

It was evident at the first glance that Professor Leonard's cook knew how to suit hungry young people. At one end a young roasted pig reposed in a garnishing of green leaves. At the other a lusciously browned turkey sent out fragrant odors.

"I wish we earned beads by eating," said Sarah. "I'm sure this supper would put three to my credit. I'm starved."

"So'm I," said ten eager voices.

"Snowshoes and tobogganing do bolster an appetite," Arthur Murray observed contentedly.

When all were seated, Frances observed that both Betty and Emmeline hastily counted those around the table.

"You needn't worry," she called mischievously. "I counted."

"Superstitious, Miss Cerrito?" Lafe asked in concern.

"Not a bit," stoutly. "Only — I don't like to tempt fate."

"Are you, Miss Wyndham?" demanded Howard Pelton.

"Oh, not a bit," Betty assured him. "But I'm glad there are fourteen at the table."

"Well, I am," said Jane defiantly. "And if there hadn't been fourteen, I'd have gone back to school."

"So'm I," said Billy. "Now, it's the queerest thing. Something always happens to me Fridays. Usually I get a letter from my father."

"Is that bad luck?" Jane demanded. "Nice way to speak about your father."

"Yes," firmly. "It *is* bad luck. If you don't believe me, I'll let you read some of 'em. I try to explain to him that there is a peculiar element in my brain that is hostile to amo, amas, amat, and keeps me from learning the stuff, and that I can't be blamed for what isn't my fault. But he won't grasp the idea."

Professor Leonard laughed genially.

"I'm the same way with geometry," Betty exclaimed impulsively. "I'd like," viciously, "to meet the man who invented it."

"Ah!" sighed Billy. "There's a girl with sense."

"Let's talk about something else," Betty said. "I don't care to spoil all the pleasure I'm getting from this lovely salad."

Ruth was at Professor Leonard's right hand, and the two had fallen into a low-toned discussion that presently attracted the attention of all. Jane mischievously passed the signal for silence, Miss Drexal smiled in quiet amusement, and then, one by one, each ceased talking.

"Fourteen of the freshman class have joined already," Ruth's clear voice was saying. "And by the end of the term I hope to have every single one. And then perhaps it will spread to the sophomores — "

The silence had suddenly come to her attention. She looked around, saw that every one was listening to her.

"Fie, Ruth," cried Emmy. "You're not coaxing Professor Leonard to join the Camp Fire Group! Shame! Taking advantage of him when politeness demands that he listen!"

Ruth laughed, not at all discomposed. "He asked me about the movement," she defended herself.

"Certainly I did," the old man gallantly assured them. "And I'm immensely interested in it. And the charming intelligent faces

of these beautiful young ladies are a testimonial to its excellence."

The "charming intelligent faces" grew very pink.

"Thank you, Professor," said Ruth, and dimpled through her blushes.

"Isn't he a dear?" Anne whispered softly to Arthur Murray.

"Sometimes," Arthur said guardedly. "Sometimes — he isn't."

"He never talks that way to us," Howard Pelton confided to Frances.

Miss Drexal, on the other side heard him. "Perhaps," she said with a smile, "he thinks the same of you, but is afraid to tell you."

"I don't think so," Billy assured her. "Judging from the past, he isn't a timid man. I'd hate to repeat some things he wasn't afraid to tell me." And Billy shook his head dolefully.

'I'll wager you deserved all he said," Jane scoffed.

Billy faced her in pained surprise. "Why, of course, I did. That's why I didn't care to hear them."

When supper was finished, and not a person at the table could eat another raisin or nut, Professor Leonard gave his arm to Miss Drexal, and led the way to the double parlors adjoining. There a piano, banjos, violins, clarionet, and a big drum promised entertainment.

The boys needed no urging. They were bent upon hospitality.

"Just tell us," said Lafe, "what you want us to do, and we'll do it." He picked up the clarionet as he spoke, and rollicked into a lilting two step that set all the feet tingling.

"Let's dance," cried Howard. In a minute, the boys had pushed the chairs back and cleared the two rooms.

"I'll play," Anne offered, and she went to the piano at once. As a waltz rippled from the keys, Lafe threw down the clarionet and he and Ruth were whirling around the room. The others followed gayly. Even Miss Drexal laughingly took a turn with Billy. And then Anne proved that she had more mischief than people credited her with. She glanced around, saw that they were all absorbed by the music. So she played faster and

faster. Her fingers flew over the keys. Quarter notes became sixteenths. The waltz was no longer a dreamy air; it was a mad gallop. The dancers moved faster and faster in obedience to the music and for awhile did not realize their speed.

At last Anne was playing faster than the swift feet could keep in step. Jane, breathless, had to pause. "I'm tired," she panted to Howard. "Anne, you little wretch, I feel like a merry-go-round."

Arthur Murray led Emmeline to a chair, and then hurried over to the piano. He was more serious and silent than the other. But with Anne, he seemed to find his tongue. He stood looking down at her soberly.

"You're awfully little to get so much noise out of a piano," he told her gravely.

Anne flushed. "Do you have to be big to do things?" she retorted.

"Guess not. Say, don't you want to come out next week and let me show you more about managing snowshoes? You are not very skillful yet, you know."

"Yes!" brightly. "I do want to learn. And I never can by myself."

Then Lafe's voice rose above the chatter. "What sort of an entertainment does the freshman class give this year?"

"Oh, Ruth has that in charge," Betty told him.

He turned to Ruth, and every one was silent to hear. Even Miss Drexal seemed very interested.

"It's a secret yet," Ruth told him gayly. "Are you coming over that evening to see us perform?"

"We certainly are," every boy cried at once. "Why, we wouldn't miss it for a farm."

"Don't expect too much," Ruth warned them.

"Well," Emmeline remarked, "I think school entertainments are a bore. Count me out of this, Ruth."

Ruth flashed her a challenging glance, and smiled. "Will I?"

"Ruth, I've been feeling curious for several days," said Betty. "I didn't like to ask, but I can't hold in my inquisitiveness much longer. Just give us a hint."

Ruth's smile was tantalizing. "To-morrow I'll tell all about it. And every 'Savage Maiden' has to do her duty."

"Oh!" Jane squealed. "I can guess. Are you, Ruth? Only on a bigger scale?"

"Say, this would be a lot more interesting if we knew what savage maidens had to do," Lafe declared.

"That's a secret," Betty primly said. "A secret that's been kept all term. So we're not apt to tell it now. It's a splendid idea, Ruth," she ended rapturously.

"What is it about, Miss Drexal?" Billy begged. "You'll not be so hard-hearted as to refuse to tell!"

"But I haven't the least idea," Miss Drexal smilingly confessed. "I never heard of them before."

"Savage maidens is a good name," Billy declared. "That's what you are, Miss Ruth, and Miss Pellew! Otherwise, you'd never get a lot of people all excited over a secret, and then not tell us what it is!"

And then Miss Drexal announced that Hiram had the bus at the door, and it was time to say good night.

The boys audibly grumbled.

"It's frightfully early," Billy complained. "Just a half hour longer, Miss Drexal! Please!"

But Miss Drexal was firm. She explained that Miss Belaire had been very positive about the hour.

"We've had a glorious time," Ruth told them when, in coat and hood, she stood on the wide porch while Hiram backed the bus around.

"Simply scrumptious," declared Jane and Sarah.

"A charming evening," said Miss Cerrito in her most-finished manner.

Miss Drexal smiled to herself as she noticed that the boys listened politely but not absorbedly to Emmeline, while bashful Anne and breezy Jane got entranced attention. As for Ruth, she was already adopted as sister and comrade by the entire crowd.

CHAPTER XIX

RUTH DISCLOSES HER PLAN

Two mornings later Ruth asked Miss Belaire to post a notice on the bulletin board that the entire freshman class was to meet in the chapel at three thirty. All the recitations were over by then and that would give two hours before time to dress for dinner. She wanted to tell her idea for the entertainment and learn if it met with approval.

Miss Belaire herself had declared Ruth's outlined program was very clever.

"I am sure it will win more applause than anything ever presented," she said.

This high praise alarmed Ruth. She began to fear that Miss Belaire would be disappointed unless she could secure the enthusiastic co-operation of the entire class. She had a strong ambition to show the derisive sophomores just what the freshmen could accomplish when they made up their minds.

So when she faced the assembled class in the chapel, she talked to the girls strongly. She was careful not to make it a Camp Fire affair. Much as she longed to, she knew that would not be fair to the remainder of the class, and just now she was more intent upon welding the class together in bands of loyalty than in furthering her own beloved Camp Fire.

"Now, girls," she began briskly, "I've thought of giving a short comic opera — "

She was interrupted by a chorus of dismayed "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" Georgia Wilton, however, sat up interestedly.

"Wait!" Ruth ordered. "It sounds awfully pretentious, I know. But this class is unusually talented — "

"That's right," called Jane; "let's throw ourselves a few bouquets!"

"Miss Belaire said so!" Ruth declared. "She said we could make a huge success of it. I know who can write the songs — "

"Oh, do you mean that we're to write it, words and everything?" Blanche Shirly cried in amazement.

"Exactly!" Ruth averred. "Why, any set of girls could give a comic opera. It's the writing that will cover us with glory."

"Well, you can count me out," announced Blanche Shirly decidedly. "I can't remember what nation had the War of the Roses. And I simply won't spend hours rehearsing."

"You're not the whole class, Blanche," Georgia Wilton put in pertly. "What kind of a comic opera, Ruth?"

Thereupon Ruth told them of the frolic of the "Savage Maidens."

"All we have to do," she declared, "is to elaborate the idea, get the correct costumes and more music."

The girls who had been at Professor Leonard's house were already familiar with her idea, and had approved of it. But since they had more than once been covertly accused of trying to dictate to the class, they sat silent until the others had expressed their varied opinions.

But Blanche was the only one who objected. Jeannette liked the idea of being in the chorus. She was sure she would have stage fright if she took a leading part.

Betty Wyndham's dramatic powers were too well-known for any one else to be thought of as hero. Jane declined to be queen.

"You need a taller and prettier girl," she unselfishly declared. "Ruth, you'd do."

"Nonsense!" Ruth retorted. "In the first place I'm a hundred miles from being pretty. And in the second, I'll be too busy arranging rehearsals and seeing to the costumes and so forth. I'll be in the chorus, that's all."

"Emmeline," Jane began —

"Certainly *not!*" retorted Emmeline. "I'd forget my lines."

"Make her," Jane asked Ruth, sure that her leader would influence Emmeline.

But Ruth for some reason did not seem to care about Emmeline's taking a principal part in the opera, and her request was made in a lukewarm fashion that Emmy found easy to withstand.

In the end Jane yielded; secretly not ill-pleased. She liked the snap of the part, and she knew that she and Betty could take the scenes off in brisk style.

Anne of course was chief flower-girl. Four oth-

ers, Nelly Andrews, two shy little things from Virginia who had slipped through the term without emerging from their reserve, and Maude Warren were selected. All four had light hair, and with golden-haired Anne, would make a striking tableau.

Because of her pert ways, Georgia Wilton was unanimously acclaimed the court jester.

"And can't I design my own costume, Ruth?" she pleaded. "I've got a splendid idea — black silk skirt covered with tinsel, and red bells; you know those of tissue paper — Christmas bells!"

"Fine!" Ruth declared. "Georgia, you have my undying gratitude. Anybody else got an idea for costumes?"

"Oh — o — oh!" Jeannette jumped up and fairly sobbed her eagerness. "Let me do that! Oh, Ruth, I'd rather design costumes than eat a maple sundae! I'll cut out all my lessons — I don't care what the teachers say — I'll work harder than you ever saw anybody work; I'll do all the sewing and the tedious work —"

"Don't worry, Jeannette. No one will take the job away from you," Ruth assured her gladly.

"But don't cut your lessons, and lose your credits, or Miss Belaire will blame me."

With some amusement she remembered that afternoon on the campus when Jeannette had confessed her dearest longing, and was sorry that she had forgotten about it. By means of this love of sewing she might have interested Jeannette in the Camp Fire. She resolved that the next term she would not put so much emphasis on the hikes and nature lore, but try to create an interest in the other lines, such as home lore and handicraft.

"I thought we would have a regular program, songs and recitations," Blanche Shirly complained. There was a note of regret in her voice that made Ruth certain she had already been prepared to participate.

"Oh, we are," Ruth explained. In arousing enthusiasm for the comic opera, she had forgotten the remainder of her plans.

"It would be too much to arrange an opera that would last all evening. And, besides," with a gay laugh, "it might be a failure — "

"No danger," Jane and Frances cried. "It'll be a howling success!"

"Oh, the conceit of some mothers' daughters!" murmured Sarah.

"And so," Ruth continued, "we'll have other numbers to fall back upon. Miss Belaire says all the villagers come, and we wouldn't want to wholly disappoint them. So I thought a song or two, and a recitation would be nice. And a quartette perhaps."

Some of the discontent vanished from Blanche's face. "I think that is wise," she announced.

"She's dying to be asked to sing," Emmeline whispered to Betty. "And Ruth doesn't understand."

But Ruth understood perfectly and was glad to include a girl who was not connected with the Camp Fire Group, and so still any rumor of favoritism.

"Since you are not in the opera, Blanche," she said casually, "I'm sure you will be willing to give a song."

"Oh, I don't know," Blanche hesitated affectedly. "Hadn't you better ask some one with a stronger voice?"

"Oh, Blanche!" Emmeline reproached her

sadly. "As if any voice in the class could compare with yours! Blanche, I'll think it is a perfect shame if you don't sing! It'll spoil the evening — "

Jane and Sarah, red-faced, hastily turned their backs and pretended to be talking. Betty held her handkerchief to her face, and smothered a forced sneeze. Emmeline might have continued indefinitely in her raillery if Ruth, with a reproachful glance, hadn't interrupted her.

"Of course she will," Ruth said decidedly. Under her breath, she murmured. "Emmeline! Aren't you ashamed?"

"She likes it," Emmeline murmured back. "See her complacent smile."

Ruth turned hastily to Frances. "And you, dear lady poet, have the hardest work of all — writing the songs and dialogue."

"If any one else," Frances began, in true woman-fashion.

"Don't ape Blanche, Frances," Emmeline ordered languidly. "You know you're the only one in school who can hammer out a quatrain. But if you need any help, come to me. I haven't

a carload of brains, but I fancy I could discount Blanche Shirly or Georgia Wilton."

"And the music," Betty demanded. "You know that night of the frolic, we simply used any tune that came into our heads. But we could not do that at a public entertainment."

"I shall leave the music to Anne," Ruth replied carelessly. "I daresay some famous composer won't object if we borrow his melodies for an hour or so."

"And return them cracked!" giggled Sarah.

"There's the five thirty bell!" Betty warned them.

Immediately there was a rush for the door. Jane fell back with Ruth as they left. Her piquant face was troubled.

"Ruth," she began impetuously, "I think you ought to have given Emmeline a prominent part. She's the most beautiful girl in the class, and we ought to show her off. If you had insisted she would have yielded and been Queen. Now, she's completely out of everything!"

"S — s — sh!" said Ruth. She looked around hastily. But Emmeline was some distance ahead of them, one arm about Anne's waist.

"Leave it to me, Jane," she whispered. "Don't you fret. Emmeline Cerrito will be the star performer of the freshman entertainment. But don't say a word. Because she doesn't know it yet, and it may take some coaxing to gain her consent."

"Good-bye!" cried Jane. "As for her consenting — you know perfectly well, Ruth, that you could coax an apple to ripen a month earlier."

CHAPTER XX

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BIG NIGHT

After that meeting, Ruth was the busiest girl in school. She felt that the chief responsibility rested upon her to make the entertainment a success. The others thought so too. Whenever a girl got in trouble or wanted help she came to Ruth.

Emmeline complained that their room was no longer a private sleeping place, but a public headquarters for the freshmen. But there was no ill-nature in her complaint. Emmeline was fast losing all her former petty traits, and she good-humoredly offered her entire wardrobe for material for costumes. She even taught the flower girls a quaint little dance that she had learned in Paris. And she wrote innumerable notes for Ruth, Jane and Betty, ran errands, and in short made herself, as Jane aptly phrased it, "a useful member of society instead of an ornament."

Ruth wished that Emmeline's father could see her now. Surely he would realize that at heart she was just a sweet unaffected girl, ready to love people as soon as she was shown how, and more than willing to make the world a better place, instead of being the foolish stubborn person that she had made him think her.

A committee of girls most handy with the needle was appointed to assist Jeannette, as it was impossible for her to make all the costumes unaided, although she would gladly have undertaken the task, and did not care much for the assistance.

Her pout had vanished. Her plump face radiated satisfaction, and she moved about in a sort of a day dream, her thoughts fixed on gorgeous skirts, flowing veils and gaudy headdresses for a tribe of "Savage Maidens."

"I got a zero in rhetoric to-day," she gigglingly told Ruth. "And I flunked mathematics all week. Said I had — oh! such a headache! Next week I'm going to have neuralgia in one side of my face. And next week Miss Belaire will say: 'Miss Barclay, will you please step into my office *immedi-*

ately after chapel exercises? There are some matters that require *immediate* explanation!'

"But — pooh!" And Jeannette shrugged her pudgy shoulders scornfully. "What do I care for a handful of old lessons?"

"Jeannette," Ruth remonstrated, "you oughtn't to — Miss Belaire will be angry, and she will write to your father — "

To quell further remonstrance, Jeannette ran away, laughing as she went.

And then Ruth went to her room where she knew Emmeline was reading. The time had come for a carefully prepared interview.

"Now, Emmeline," she began coaxingly, "won't you do something for me? You're the only one in the school that can do it, and I've counted on you, and if you refuse — "

"My dearest Ruth," said Emmeline in alarm that was half-affected, half-real, Ruth's appeal was so very earnest, "you know quite well that I will do anything you ask me to, if it is in my power. Good gracious! How could I refuse after all you have done for me since I came!" She caught Ruth's hand, and affectionately drew it

close against her cheek. "Speak! Thy slave awaits!"

Ruth hesitated. Her eyes held Emmeline's.

"There is one thing that you must not ask," Emmy said hastily, with a touch of coldness in her voice. "Nothing connected with my father —"

"Oh, no," Ruth assured her. "It's just that I want you to take part in the entertainment. You wouldn't mind? I need another number."

Ruth sighed. She was really tired, for she had worked indefatigably, and a warm rush of pity for the big-hearted unselfish girl rushed over Emmeline. All at once she felt lazy and self-centred.

Impulsively she threw an arm around Ruth and drew her down in the rocker. It was an unusual occurrence for indifferent Emmy to show any affection, and Ruth was surprised.

"Of course I will," said Emmeline. "Whatever I can do, you poor hard-working child, to help make that thing a success, you just let me know. I'll stifle my ingrowing modesty, and even dance a jig, if you say so."

Ruth was afraid to raise her glowing eyes and let Emmy see her delight. She had not expected

so easy a victory. She flung both arms around Emmeline's neck, and whispered her request.

"O — oh!" Emmy said in dismay. "Not that, Ruth."

"You promised," Ruth persisted. "Please, Emmy!"

"Well, since I promised," Emmeline slowly conceded, "I suppose I will have to. But, Ruth," imperiously, "I won't have my name on the program — "

"All right," readily. "It will create more wonder if it doesn't appear. I won't even tell Betty and Anne."

After that Ruth sent matters on with a rush. Short scenes were rehearsed in the various rooms. Every week, a big rehearsal was held in one of the larger recitation rooms. Anne and Frances pushed Sarah out of her own room, took absolute possession of it, and locked the door. They wanted privacy."

"Privacy with a capital P," said Frances determinedly. "And Betty and Jane won't give us that room, so we have to take this."

"And I can camp in the corridor!" complained Sarah.

"Camp in the woods if you like," they told her impertinently. "Go up to the cave."

Whereupon Sarah got Jane to help her and threw books over the transom, hoping that one might hit somebody or something.

But when little demure Anne came rushing out with a snowshoe brandished furiously, and drove them down the corridor, they fled.

As the days went on, the sophomores tried to find out the form of the entertainment. They listened for stray words, they loitered by open doors, and made themselves a nuisance.

But the freshmen class was now a unit, instead of a dozen cliques. As one girl, they rose to secrecy. Even Blanche Shirly forgot the dress she was having made for the grand night, and gave the snippy upper-class girls more than they had bargained for.

Pretending not to see two sophomores in a dim end of the corridor, as they were returning to their rooms from dinner one evening, she said in a low, apparently cautious tone to Georgia Wilton:

"Don't you think the audience will be awfully bored if they have to listen to twenty recitations?"

"Frightfully," said Georgia with emphasis. "But Ruth is such a dear girl — "

And the whole class chuckled when they learned that the two sophomores had disgustedly reported that the freshman affair would be awfully tame; just a string of silly old recitations.

"And I was careful not to tell an untruth," Blanche gaily boasted. "I said they would be bored *if* they had to listen to recitations!"

Miss Belaire always supplied an orchestra from the city a few miles away. But the arrangement of the stage of the chapel was left to the girls. Fortunately, each girl's room was well decorated with branches of red and yellow autumn leaves, and every one was glad to contribute her store. It was prim Betty who had the courage to ask Miss Belaire if they might borrow the potted palms and ferns that were liberally placed throughout the big double parlors.

Yet even then the stage was bare. Ruth was very much dissatisfied with its appearance. She sat in a chair and thoughtfully tried to think of something.

"My dear girls," said Emmeline who had wandered down to see the final effect, "why don't you

get a few young pine trees from the woods? There is a plentiful supply at hand."

"Just the thing!" Ruth cried. "But — I wonder how we could get them? Hiram has the rheumatism — he couldn't go. And we couldn't chop them down ourselves!"

Anne, with a pretty pink spot in each cheek, said clearly, "I know."

"Then, for goodness' sake, Anne, tell us!" Jane commanded.

"I'm sure," demurely, "that Professor Leonard's boys would get them for us. Betty, you telephone and ask them."

"Anne!" Betty exclaimed primly. "I'd die before I'd do anything so cheeky! I'm surprised!"

"The only thing that surprises me," Jane said candidly, "is what our shy bashful Anne is apt to develop into. The audacity of her! Instead of a modest violet, Anne, I'm going to call you our brazen hollyhock!"

The pink of Anne's cheeks flamed into red. But she bravely held her ground. "I don't care. They will be glad to do it. And I'd just as soon ask them if," appealingly, "no one else will."

"Why, I'll telephone this minute," Ruth cried. "Ask them! Why didn't we think of that splendid idea before?"

And Lafe Grinnell who answered the telephone declared promptly that the boys would have a wagonload of the straightest, prettiest pine trees on those hills at the academy before night.

And they did. Whereat the sophomores separated into chattering groups to discuss the affair.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GALA NIGHT

At dinner, the evening of the performance, the freshmen were subdued. Miss Belaire had ordered theirs served an hour earlier that they might have more time. They left the dining room just as a bus deposited a load of people at the front doors. Several parents had arrived to take their daughters home for the holidays.

Most of the performers were dismayed at this addition to their audience. But Ruth was sure these relatives would view the entertainment with kindlier eyes than the upper class girls. And she whispered a word of encouragement to as many girls as she could in the short time left. It was needed; because when they looked out from the little recess back of the chapel, and saw the big roomful of faces, several knees wabbled.

They recognized many of the villagers. Old Jonathan and his wife occupied front seats. The

little old lady who kept the shop where they got the snowshoes was there, her faded blue eyes twinkling. Mr. Martin of the ice cream refectory, whom every girl knew intimately, was there, his gray whiskers smoothly brushed and his white apron replaced by a broadcloth coat.

Suddenly there was a loud commotion of heavy feet. Down the aisle marched Professor Leonard and his boys. Blanche Shirly, who was dressed, was peeking out, and she immediately rushed back to the girls with a piece of astounding news.

"Girls, every boy has a broad leather badge pinned across his coat, a foot long and four inches wide. On them is printed in gold letters, 'Honorary Member of the Hillside Camp Fire Group.' When did they join? Ruth, I'll join next term!"

The Camp Fire Girls dropped rouge pots and feather headdresses to gasp. And then they had to laugh at the audacity.

"Such cheek!" cried Jane. "Wait till I get Billy Randolph!"

The girls had no time then to spend in discussion. But after the performance, Jane cornered Billy, and he explained speciously that the boys

had intended to ask permission — which they knew would be granted — and had ordered the badges so as to have them ready. And when they were delivered ahead of time, no one could resist the temptation to wear them.

The audience settled itself before reading the program. Expecting nothing but recitations, the upper classes opened theirs leisurely. And then they gasped twice; first at the cool announcement that a comic opera would be given; second, at the name of the composer — Anne Follett. Everyone knew the shy, dainty little Southern girl by sight on account of her lovely hair and eyes. But few were acquainted with her. And the sophomores stared with big round eyes.

The first number was an octette. Eight of the less prominent girls whose voices and courage were not equal to an unsupported appearance, got through two old college songs very creditably but not brilliantly.

The sophomores smiled scoffingly at each other, and the peeking freshmen saw them.

Then Blanche Shirly and Jeannette Hayes sang a duet. In the last week, Blanche developed

stage fright, and coaxed Jeannette to aid her with her contralto. Both wore elaborate new gowns; white charmeuse liberally trimmed with festoons of pearls and yards of costly lace. Their hair was puffed and waved into ornate masses. A ripple of laughter from the upper classes greeted them. But they had excellent voices, and finally the raillery ended in polite applause.

Maude Warren, Nelly Andrews and Ella Windsor next gave a rollicking negro melody on banjos. This too received polite but unenthusiastic applause. Georgia Wilton ended the first part of the program. Her costume for the opera was easily donned, so she was put last to give the other girls more time. She swaggered on the stage in short walking skirt, rough blouse and a shaggy tweed cap, and gave a vivacious imitation of a college boy discussing a football game. Her pert expression and saucy ways aided her recitative powers. Old Jonathan laughed till he cried.

Then the orchestra down in front played the first bars of a sprightly overture, and the curtain was rolled up for the first scene of "The Queen of the Lonely Isle."

The chorus of fifteen girls sprang to the front of the stage and sent out a burst of song that dumfounded the audience. Their costumes were a tribute to Jeannette's genius. Each one wore a gorgeous headdress of flowers, and each costume followed the design of the flowers. Ruth, who being the tallest was leader, was a sunflower. She wore a nodding coronet of the yellow flowers, and her costume was black silk adorned with yellow satin petals. Her shoes and stockings were yellow. Sarah represented red and pink carnations. Over a red silk slip, she had draped pink chiffon veils. The result was a vividness of color that dazed the beholder. Frances was a marigold. She swished her monstrous orange headdress and orange sateen skirts about with an abandon that told of an utter absence of stage fright on her part. Purple violets, pink jack roses, yellow chrysanthemums, and lavender morning-glories helped make the stage a riot of color.

There was a dash to Frances' verses that convulsed the audience. Every sophomore leaned forward in breathless interest. Then after the description of the maidens' lonely lives, the Queen,

a vision in purple and gold draperies, with a towering headdress of royal-hued orchids, advanced. After her came the flower girls, led by Anne. They represented forget-me-nots, and their light hair streamed down over delicate pink and blue costumes.

The ode of welcome to the Queen rolled out sonorously. Blanche Shirly had taken a seat down among the audience, and she reported afterward that the sophomores were "simply crushed."

As Jane trilled the last sad words of her forlorn plight, the hero arrived and dashed forward. If Betty Wyndham's name hadn't been on the program, no one would have guessed her identity. Instead of the cadet suit, she wore a long black broadcloth coat lined with red satin, one of Emmeline's possessions. It came below her knees but showed high boots. About her waist was strapped a monstrous sword of red cardboard. Her hat was a red sombrero with a purple sash, and it flopped rakishly over her fiercely mustached face.

Whatever primness Betty displayed in everyday life, she forgot it all the moment she began to recite or act. And this night she outdid any-

thing that the academy had ever witnessed. She was not a schoolgirl. She was for the time being actually a bold conquering swaggering hero, ready to rule and lay prostrate a whole island.

"The seniors are going to ask you to join their dramatic club," Blanche, the scout, reported proudly when it was over.

There was no lagging in the music. It went with a whirl and snap that gave no observer time to think, much less to criticize. And when it was over, the upper classes rose in a body and clapped till their palms were almost blistered.

As the curtain went down, there were calls for "Ruth Garnier! "O you Ru — uthie! The Freshman Boss!"

Ruth refused to go out until the calls threatened to raise the roof. And then she pulled Betty out with her, and they bowed their thanks for the applause. Betty pulled off her sombrero and swept the ground in mock salutation.

When the clapping still continued, the curtain was raised and the entire troupe appeared. Some one started a call for the author and composer — Jane said she recognized Arthur Murray's strong

lungs — and Frances Bliss led Anne out. Frances had poise and dignity. She walked out with perfect self-possession, and bowed condescendingly in the direction of the sophomores. Anne still wore her pale blue forget-me-not costume. She was so little and dainty, and her golden hair was so long, that a fervid gasp of admiration swept the whole chapel. Every one had a handkerchief waving frantically until the big room was a white sea.

"Hurrah for Bliss!" chanted the upper classes. "Can she write? Well, I guess she can!"

And then the chant was changed to "Follett! Follett!"

Anne would have fled backward had not Frances determinedly held her hand. In the midst of the cheers the leader of the orchestra rose and handed up two enormous bunches of flowers; American beauties for Frances, and a mass of white roses for little Anne.

In a minute he was handing other bunches; pink chrysanthemums for Ruth, and pink and red roses for Sarah and Jane and the remainder of the class. And each bunch was inscribed:

"From the Honorary Members of the Camp Fire Group."

"I suppose," Jane whispered to Ruth, sniffing the fragrance, "that if we accept them, we will have to admit them." And Ruth knew what the pronouns referred to, and smiled assent.

As the flower-laden girls bowed their way off the stage, and the curtain went down, most of the audience remained standing and prepared to depart. They seemed to have forgotten that there was one more number on the program.

But a few remembered and reseated themselves. The orchestra began a soft exquisite melody. Then the others consulted their programs, and read: "Song."

That was all. Just one word, with no name following. The orchestra wailed softly into silence. Then the first violinist was seen to station his music rack in the place occupied by the orchestra leader.

All during the evening, Ruth had peered out at the audience whenever she had opportunity. Now she opened the door of the dressing room, and anxiously looked again.

"Any one would think you were looking for some one," Jane said at last. Ruth did not answer, but there was a satisfied gleam in her eyes as though she had at last found what she sought.

Then the curtain went up very slowly. Every one drew a long hushed breath. The stage was bare except for a Greek urn at one side, filled with white roses. Standing in the center of the stage, not far back of the footlights, was Emmeline Cerrito.

All knew that she was beautiful. But none had ever realized until then how very beautiful. She was gowned in pure white, the exquisite gown of crepe de chine that her mother had sent a month before. Her lovely dark hair was parted, brought softly down over her ears, and then coiled, Grecian-style, at the back of her head. She wore no ornament, no jewels, not even a single rose, and her face was colorless.

The violin began the soft sweet prelude. Without stepping forward, she clasped her hands and began to sing. For a moment her voice wavered. She confessed afterward that she had meant to sing in unemotional fashion, without using the full

power of her voice. But she couldn't keep it within bounds. The notes that she never meant to sound poured out in liquid melody.

Many of those present had heard the villanelle of *Eva Dell'Acqua.* But no one had ever heard it sung with the passion that this slender beautiful girl poured into it. It was the passion of an artiste.

Before the listeners had time to be surprised, they were motionless with awe. Not a one drew a breath lest a single note be missed. They forgot that they were listening to a school entertainment. They were lifted out of all realization of the surroundings — as people are lifted only by world-renowned singers.

As for Emmeline — she too had forgotten where she was. Once again her ambition had gripped her heartstrings, and she was pouring out all the pent up longing of the past years. Her bitterness, her grief, whose depths no one but Ruth had understood, overwhelmed her, and rushed up in heart-rending melody.

She was singing her futile hopes, her weariness of life. Down some of the upturned faces, tears

coursed unconsciously. The clear sweet notes softened into ineffable pathos, and died away in a low haunting strain.

In a profound silence, that was the most significant applause, the curtain dropped before the silent singer.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ESTRANGEMENT ENDED

The silence held for a full minute. Emmeline had cast a wonderful spell. Then a roar of applause called her back. But she had collapsed after the emotional outpouring, and had no more vitality left. She was sitting limply on a chair, and she stubbornly refused to go on, although Jane, Betty, Frances and Anne tried to induce her. They looked around for Ruth to aid their entreaties, but Ruth had disappeared.

When the repeated applause brought no return of the singer, the audience rose, and slowly made its way out, stopping in the aisles to chat and exchange excited comments over the last number.

Those of the girls who had visiting relatives had flown to meet them. Between dinner and dressing, they had had no chance before.

Ruth darted up to a tall serious-faced man with piercing black eyes. Those around supposed that

he was her father. He had come in the second bus load that arrived while the freshmen were getting ready for the opera. After a short animated exchange of greetings, she led him quickly back to the small room that the troupe had utilized as a dressing room.

Many of the girls had deserted it. But Emmeline was waiting till the crowd left before slipping up to her room. And most of the Camp Fire Girls were standing around her. When Ruth brought the tall man in, they looked up eagerly, ready to be introduced to Mr. Garnier. But Emmeline sprang up in a sort of a panic.

"Mon pere!" she gasped, relapsing into the French that was more familiar than English.

"My dear little daughter," he began tenderly and held out his arms.

For a moment, Emmeline hesitated, the hard bitter look coming back to her face. But she could not keep it up. The hard stratum of her character had been skillfully undermined by Ruth, and was a crumbling layer. And the pathos of her own singing had further softened her.

With a cry that was half a sob, she flung herself

into her father's arms. Ruth, watching happily, was sure that the estrangement was over. And later her conviction was made certainty.

"I never realized, Emmeline," her father said wonderingly, "what a wonderful voice you had. I thought the teachers were overestimating it and fostering your vanity merely for the money for lessons. But I own now that I was in error."

"Father!" Emmeline gasped, not daring to hope.

The girls, feeling that they were intruders, slipped out. Ruth would have gone, but Mr. Cerrito drew her back to listen to what he had to say.

"I own freely that I blundered," he said in a broken voice. "Such a voice as you have, my dear, is a gift from God. You owe it to Him and to the world to have it developed. And now all this time has been wasted — "

"No, it hasn't," Emmeline interrupted gayly. She seemed transformed. Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed. She fairly trembled with happiness and life.

"Not a day was wasted. Perhaps I've missed a few music lessons, but I've learned lessons far

more important. And Ruth here has taught me. She is the dearest, cleverest, kindest girl — ''

But then Ruth, blushing, broke away and left the room.

Out in the chapel, the sophomores, juniors, seniors, Professor Leonard and his boys, Miss Belaire and the other teachers were congratulating the blushing ''Savage Maidens.''

''Surprised!'' cried Billy. ''Why, say, we never looked for anything like this!''

''In other words you underrated us!'' Jane declared with mock offense.

When Ruth appeared, everyone turned to her, forgetting the triumph and filled with curiosity concerning Emmeline's father.

''We never knew she could sing,'' Betty said wonderingly. ''Why didn't she tell?''

Ruth quickly turned the conversation back to the opera. She didn't like to discuss Emmy's affairs.

''Well,'' she asked Lafe, dropping a deep curtsey, ''did it meet with your approval?''

''One girl struck a wrong note in the second verse,'' Lafe said thoughtfully. ''I don't remember which — but she represented marigolds.''

Without delay, Frances snatched off her gaudy headdress of marigolds, and advanced to him.

He fled, laughing, and called back. "Maybe it was the carnation lady!"

Before Sarah could seek retaliation, Emmeline and her father came out to join them. Emmeline's lovely eyes shone like stars as she presented her father.

"And he never gave me the least hint that he was coming!" she cried. "When did you decide, father?" she turned and asked.

Over the intervening heads, his twinkling eyes met Ruth's. Emmeline caught the amused exchange of glances.

"I believe —" Emmeline cried — "I actually believe, Ruth Garnier, that you planned everything!"

"You're a remarkably good guesser, my daughter," Mr. Cerrito laughed.

With an impetuosity more characteristic of breezy Jane than her own languid self, Emmeline flew at Ruth and hugged her until the crushed girl begged for breath.

"Twelve o'clock!" called Miss Belaire. "And some of you must get up early to take the train."

They separated slowly. And still more slowly the boys from across the hill followed Professor Leonard out.

"But there's next term," Ruth called gayly, as the girls reached the dormitory. "And," exultingly, "every member of the freshman class, including Blanche Shirly, wants to join the Camp Fire Group!"